A Qualitative Study of Programs Including Students with Complex Support Needs in the General Education Curriculum

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Abstract of Dissertation

A Qualitative Study of Programs Including Students with Complex Support Needs in the General Education Curriculum

This study examined special education and general education teacher understandings of inclusive education for their students with complex support needs. Teachers were asked to discuss their experiences with inclusive education, focusing on their students with complex support needs in the areas of behavior, cognition, or medical/physical needs.

The study design included semi-structed interviews with sixteen teachers, including twelve special education and four general education teachers. All participants confirmed that they taught at least one student with complex support needs who was included in the general education classroom setting for at least 50% of the school day. Interviews were transcribed verbatim using the software Rev, then were coded and analyzed using the Dedoose software.

Emergent themes clustered around the need for strategies to support students with complex support needs, planning and monitoring for program outcomes, and factors that influence the success of students with complex support needs in the inclusive setting. Themes relating to strategies for inclusion focused on strategies that could be utilized to support the overall classroom as well as providing content instruction. Themes relating to planning and monitoring for program outcomes included understanding students and observing their growth, monitoring IEPs, changes in social engagement, and transition planning. Themes included in factors influencing inclusion included relational factors, pedagogical factors, and physical factors.

The understandings from this study highlight the need for teachers to be prepared with the tools and strategies they need to successfully include their students with complex support needs, a need for overall training and awareness about special education, and changes in the standard grading system. Additionally, continued research should focus on how to support both staff and students in the general education classroom setting.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

There has been significant progress made to include students with disabilities into the general-education classroom (Mader, 2017) since the passing of IDEA. Schools must work to accommodate students with disabilities in the school setting according to the law (IDEA, 2004). In 2014, 6,697,938 students with disabilities ranging in age from three to twenty-one were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which provides special education services to individuals with disabilities (USDOE, 2016). The IDEA is one of the leading governing policies concerning students with disabilities and their education and provides the framework for many decisions made regarding a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), accommodations and modifications, services, and placement. The IDEA also guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as a right for all students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

IDEA (2004) intends to safeguard access to education, even for students with disabilities. The law aims to protect the rights of children and families with disabilities and special education needs and provide direction for educational agencies at multiple levels to assist them with providing students with FAPE. Early childhood education objectives, along with teacher preparation and accountability are also discussed. The LRE provision within IDEA has been a part of the legislation in some form or another since its introduction in 1975. The most recent reauthorization of IDEA occurred in 2004. The LRE provision states that:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, 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 regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004).

In addition to defining the least restrictive environment, the legislation also determines that funding means cannot disobey the LRE provision or be tied to the placement of a student in a way that violates that student's right to a FAPE. The right to be educated in the LRE is a protection provided to all students with disabilities receiving services under the IDEA.

In addition to the IDEA statute, there have also been numerous guiding documents released by the United States Department of Education and other agencies. *Dear Colleague Letters*, in particular, have helped to clarify the suggested interpretations of the law (https://ifap.ed.gov/ifap/byYear.jsp?type=dpcletters, retrieved 14 March 2019).

With regards to preschool age students, The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has suggested that students in early childhood programs with disabilities should be educated alongside their same-age peers. They have also issued guidance that suggests that other placements outside of placement within the local school district should be explored for early childhood students with disabilities. States are responsible for ensuring a continuum of services is offered to all students, even those at early childhood stages (Musgrove, 2012). Updates to this guidance regarding early

childhood education for students with disabilities have reaffirmed the right of preschool students with disabilities to be educated in the LRE and advised that the first placement option should always be the general education classroom with supports (Ryder, 2017).

In the K-12 education arena, OSEP policy guidance has also responded to specific questions regarding residential facilities and LRE preferences for students living in those facilities to indicate that students should still be educated in the LRE, and that the first option should be the school that the child would attend if he or she were not disabled (Musgrove, 2011).

Despite research indicating universal improvements for students with disabilities who are included in the general education classroom even for parts of the day, there continue to be problems and challenges associated with full implementation of the law. Data from the Department of Education continues to show that students served under IDEA continue to be included in general education classrooms at a lower rate than their nondisabled peers, with 62.6% of students with disabilities being included in the general education setting for at least 50% of the day (USDOE, 2016). Students with low incidence disabilities including intellectual disability, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairments, autism, and multiple disabilities are included at an even lower rate, with 13.4% of students labeled as having multiple disabilities and 16.9% of students labeled as having intellectual disabilities included in the general education classroom (USDOE, 2016).

This preference for placement at the school that the child would attend if he or she were not disabled has been well documented through the Department of Education guidance, however judicial holdings on the matter have yielded mixed interpretations

with variances and inconsistencies therein. There are a large breadth and depth of opinions regarding making LRE decisions, and there are a variety of interpretations of how to best provide students with disabilities with their legally guaranteed access to the general education curriculum given the extensive documentation and opinions regarding making LRE decisions. One way to ensure that students with disabilities are provided general education access is through inclusion guided by research with their typically developing peers in academic subjects.

Some research indicates that teachers are often not trained to make the accommodations and modifications necessary to successfully include students with disabilities (Mader, 2017). In response to a push from advocacy groups, families, and individuals with disabilities themselves to include more students in the general education classroom, more students with disabilities are spending time in the general education classroom (Mader, 2017). Simply placing a student with disabilities in the classroom will not work and is not true and effective inclusion, as teachers must be prepared and armed with resources and supports to promote inclusion (Mader, 2017). Due to this understanding, this study seeks to find a program reputable for successful inclusion that includes resources and support for teachers and school personnel.

This study examined the way that special education and general education teachers addressed this challenge by examining the variety of practices, including research-based practices, utilized to provide an inclusive school setting to students with complex support needs, which includes students who have significant needs in the areas of behavior or life skills. The students, with ranging disabilities, all had complex support needs and participated in the general education classroom as the least restrictive

environment for at least 50% of the school day. There was a need to study the practices and methods of the profession to develop a better understanding of how an inclusive learning environment is provided for students with complex support needs.

Overview

According to a recent presentation by Jorgensen, Inclusive education practices have been shown to be valuable for all students with disabilities regardless of the severity or impact of the disability, diagnosis, and demographic characteristics (2017). Segregated environments, by comparison, have no research documenting their effectiveness over an inclusive classroom environment (Kluth, 2019; Falvey, et al., 2000).

Decisions about the placement of students with disabilities are made by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team, which consists of parents, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a local education agency representative, and any other people knowledgeable about the student that the parent or school district feels should be included (IDEA, 2004). When making a placement decision, the IEP team must consider the least restrictive environment for the student, which is the environment that allows the student to have the most access to the general education curriculum while also accessing his or her educational environment. Placements are on a continuum which ranges from all services in the general education setting, some services in a resource setting, all services in a special education setting, a separate school, and a hospital setting. The placement decision must be reviewed annually and must not be made based on the need for accommodations and modifications in the general education setting (IDEA, 2004).

This study looked at specific benefits for students with disabilities including instructional as well as social and functional benefits in an inclusive setting. When considering math and reading achievement in traditional versus inclusive classrooms, studies of students in inclusive settings show students made more academic progress and their progress was comparable to or greater than the progress made by their peers without disabilities (Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; Cole, et al., 2004). In addition, with consideration for student IEP goals, objectives, and mastery, students who were enrolled in general education classes were found to have higher quality and higher scored IEPs (Kluth, 2019; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992). .

While there are documented academic benefits, social benefits have also been observed for individuals with disabilities, noting that students with disabilities in inclusive environments are more likely to develop friendships and have improved social communications and opportunities when they are involved in the general education curriculum regardless of severity of disability (Carter, et al., 2016; Carter, et al., 2008). Functional benefits for students educated in inclusive environments have also been documented, with students in inclusive settings showing more achievement and mastery in the area of adaptive and functional behaviors when compared to students with disabilities educated in segregated settings (Cole, et al., 2004).

Similar to results for students with disabilities, research has shown that inclusion does not limit educational chances or academic achievement for peers in included classrooms (Choi, et al., 2016). With regards to standardized testing, schools employing inclusive practices have shown increased student growth on state assessments when compared to schools with a traditional education model that separates students with

disabilities (Choi, et al., 2016). In addition to standardized test scores, students without disabilities were also able to make statistically significant gains in both math and reading when they were educated in inclusive settings (Cole, et al., 2004). These students are able to make this progress because they are provided with individualized instruction and supports, which can include instruction from a special education teacher or other accommodations (Mader, 2017). Additionally, according to Mader (2017), general education teachers indicate that they learn to make their lessons more accessible and accommodating through experience in special education.

Research has also shown that inclusive education has enhanced the social skills of typically developing students by making them more aware of the needs of others and understanding the behaviors of individuals with disabilities (Schogren, et al., 2015; Staub, 2005). There have also been documented changes in peers with regards to self-esteem, friendships, morals and ethics, tolerance, and comfort level with individuals with disabilities as a result of inclusive education practices (Schogren, et al., 2015; Staub, 2005).

This study examined the way that personnel in schools provided students with complex support needs with an inclusive education in the general education classroom. School staff members, including special and general education teachers, had the opportunity to provide information on how they provide an inclusive education to students with complex support needs.

Statement of the Problem

As Jorgensen (2017) indicates, research produced during the last 30 years indicates that full inclusion of students with complex support needs is beneficial for both

students with and without disabilities. Some research suggests that segregated environments for students with complex support needs, by comparison, have not been shown to embody many of the benefits typically described by advocates of self-contained classrooms including specialized instruction, behavior support, and an environment with fewer distractions (Causton-Theoharis, et al., 2011). Other research indicates students with disabilities in inclusive settings have demonstrated more academic progress than those in traditional self-contained classrooms, with progress being comparable to or greater than the progress made by peers without disabilities (Kluth, 2019; Cole, et al., 2004). Additionally, students enrolled in general education classes were found to have higher quality and higher scored IEPs (Kluth, 2019; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992). Inclusive educational practices have also been linked to improvements in social communication skills, regardless of severity of disability (Carter, et al., 2016; Carter, et al., 2008).

When students with complex support needs are not included in the general education classroom, they do not receive access to the same educational opportunities. Teachers and school personnel need to be equipped to further the mission of inclusion by using resources and strategies that promote success for all students, regardless of disability status. There is a need for an inclusion framework that guides the facilitation of inclusive educational practices for students with complex support needs so that all students can experience the benefits of inclusion and have a robust educational experience. This study explored how school systems are implementing effective inclusive education practices that allow students with complex support needs to meaningfully participate in the general education classroom setting.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the current resources, strategies, and methods used by personnel involved in the effective inclusion of students with complex support needs in the general education classroom. For the purpose of this study, inclusion was defined as spending 50% or more of the day in the general education classroom with or without supports. This purpose was explored through the use of Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) qualitative research framework with an emphasis on the use of basic interpretive design methods. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom?
2. What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to successful inclusion of students with complex support needs?
3. How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?

Statement of Potential Significance

Understanding what works to include students with complex disabilities into the general education classroom is significant because it allows teachers and school staff members to engage in practices that provide their students with opportunities for success in the general education setting. This study was an important addition to research literature and may help to inform practices and policies within local education agencies around inclusive education. This study explored how teachers utilized effective research-

based methods as well as other methods to successfully include their students with complex disabilities. The results from this study can help to provide insight and clarity into how teachers make inclusion work for students with complex disabilities. Practitioners were able to utilize the results of the study to create a framework for the successful inclusion of their own students in the general education classroom. Due to the extensive research support for inclusion and inclusive practices, an increase in knowledge around how to include students with disabilities can be beneficial in providing more access to students.

Theoretical Perspective/ Conceptual Framework

For this study, two main theoretical perspectives were used to guide the researcher's understanding, systems theory and the principles of normalization.

Theoretical Perspectives

Systems Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was rooted in systems theory, which argues that the school works as a system with multiple variables influencing the system as a whole so it cannot be studied as independent of its context (Skyttner, 2005). While there are many variables considered in the conceptual framework, this study specifically focuses on four school-based factors grounded in the literature (See Figure 1) that are needed to support inclusion of students with disabilities that include: policy implementation, interpersonal/relational factors, physical requirements, and pedagogy.

Normalization

Normalization is a principle intended to be applied to all people across societies and age groups regardless of their level of disability (Nirje, 1992). Normalization is

defined as “making available to all persons those patterns of life and conditions of everyday living that are as close as possible to, or indeed the same as, the regular circumstances and ways of life of their communities and their culture” (Nirje, 1992). According to Wolfensberger (1970), normalization is applicable to all socially devalued groups and can be used to improve their lives.

It relates to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education setting because students are provided with an education in the least restrictive environment as much as is possible. The principle of normalization can be a lens through which to view inclusion for students with complex support needs in the general education setting.

Conceptual Framework

The variables affecting the system in this conceptual framework were developed through a content analysis of current research on inclusive educational practices. Each of the variables functions within the system to influence inclusive education (See Figure 1).

Policy Implementation

In terms of policy, IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 contribute to the ability and legal precedent for students with disabilities to be included and provided with access to the general education curriculum and classroom with their peers (Taylor, 2011). The ADA and Section 504 function to prohibit discrimination and ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from settings that receive federal funding, including schools (Taylor, 2011). IDEA and Section 504 contain additional provisions around FAPE and LRE, which ensures that students receive an education in the least restrictive environment (Taylor, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

Interpersonal and Relational Factors

Interpersonal and relational factors included in this conceptual framework include teacher self-efficacy, educational leadership, families, students, human resources, and support. Self- efficacy considers teachers' feelings confidence and is likely that their practices and quality of instruction will reflect such feelings and may help to make inclusion more successful. Educational leadership is vital in the success of an inclusive school, and school leaders must also promote a culture of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). Similar to the administrator vision and culture of inclusion, families also likely play a role in whether or not their children are included in the general education classroom. Students also factor into the success of an inclusive school program, however a significant gap exists in research focusing on student opinions about their inclusive experiences, as there is limited research focusing on this topic. Lastly, when the school provides qualified staff members who are competent and able to facilitate evidence-based practices effectively, student achievement may increase (Brock, et al., 2017). This is related to the allocation and use of human resources and support within the school setting.

Physical Requirements

Based on student and teacher accounts, it is clear that the physical spaces of the classroom and school may hinder the ability of students to access their school community (Stanton- Chaman & Schmidt, 2016; Pivik, et al., 2002). In a two-year study and report published by the U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, results indicated that 83 percent of the elementary schools in New York City were not up to code (Khan, 2015). In addition, six

school districts in New York did not have a single accessible elementary school (Khan, 2015).

Physical access can also include funding or materials and resources, such as the playground areas discussed by Stanton- Chaman and Schmidt (2016) as well as the physical building setup (Stephens, et al., 2015). In New York City, schools that were inaccessible were found to lack ramps and elevators, signs without Braille, and counters that were too high (Khan, 2015). Schools that create a physical environment that promotes access for all students, regardless of disability, seem likely to help promote inclusive practices and inclusion itself.

Pedagogy

Another important consideration in this conceptual framework is pedagogy. Teachers and school staff must be trained to be effective implementers of inclusive education. When teachers and school staff have training and professional development opportunities, they are able to provide better instruction and meaningful interactions for their students. Curriculum also likely plays a role in the successful inclusion of students with complex support needs when the curriculum is modified and adapted to meet the needs of the student, and when it is appropriate for the developmental level of the student.

In addition to curriculum the methods and strategies that can encourage inclusion may include peer support systems (Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Carter, et al., 2015; Copeland & Coseby, 2010; Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Spooner, et al., 2006), co-teaching (Sweigart & Landr 2015), story-based instruction (Browder, et al., 2012), response cards (Clarke, et al., 2016, Randolph, 2007), curriculum modifications and

accommodations (Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007), embedded instruction trials with constant time delay (Hudson, et al., 2013), visual supports (Cohen & Demchak, 2018; Dettmer, et al., 2000; Jaime & Knowlten, 2007), and school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS; Kurth & Enyart, 2016). Teachers and school staff who are able to use some or all of these strategies, including some components of each, may be able to better create an inclusive environment that allows all students to learn.

Teachers' pedagogical decisions about the structure and organization of their classrooms, interactions with students, activities, resources, and student engagement can also impact all aspects of a student's educational experience, including placement and type of instruction. Teachers who make pedagogical decisions that consider providing students with access seem to be promoters of inclusion and may contribute to the successes of inclusion.

Summary of Methodology

The research questions were best explored using a qualitative approach, which focuses on developing an understanding of how people experience and make sense of their lives and experiences. Using this focus, qualitative design typically includes the consideration of a research problem, the development of research questions, data collection and analysis, and reporting the results (Creswell, 2013). This study consisted of a basic interpretive study, which intended to provide a general interpretation of the subject area being studied (Merriam, 2009).

The participants for this study were general education or special education teachers who work with students with disabilities who are included in the public school general education classroom for at least 50% of the school day in the United States. All

participants were required to have been working in their school district for the entire duration of one school year. Policies and practices that were considered included those practiced at the classroom, school, and district level.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants in this study. The specific type of purposeful sampling that was used is snowball sampling (Merriam, 2016). Snowball sampling, also called network sampling, allows the researcher to ask participants to identify other participants who may have rich information related to the research (Merriam, 2016). Snowball sampling is typically used when certain groups of participants are difficult to locate or may be rare (Crosman, 2015). For this study, special education and general education teachers working in the areas of special education and inclusive practices were asked to identify other participants who may have inclusion experiences through the use of snowball sampling.

In order to complete this study, interviews and an optional review of teacher lesson plan documents were completed. First, each of the general education or special education teachers who were implementing the inclusion process for a student with complex support needs were asked to participate in an interview intended to gather qualitative data on the mechanisms and resources used to include the student. At that time, they were asked to provide any lesson plans that they were interested in sharing. Interview data was recorded and transcribed, as well as provided to participants for a member check review. These notes and materials were kept in a locked cabinet with only the researcher having access.

Data was analyzed through open coding and axial coding. Open coding, also called initial coding, allows the researcher to break down the data into small parts and

closely examine the parts, looking for similarities (Saldana, 2016, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These similarities can be used to note patterns and themes that are related to the research questions of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the open coding process, in vivo coding was utilized to ensure that the voices of participants were honored and recognized (Saldana, 2016). After the initial coding was complete, axial coding was used as a second step. Important themes were explored by noting repetitions or recurrences of concepts, missing data, and theory-related materials (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The final step in the data analysis process, according to Roulston (2014) was writing up and interpreting the research findings. These are presented in Chapter 4 through the emerging themes as they relate to the research questions and conceptual framework. Trustworthiness and credibility techniques were utilized.

Delimitations and Limitations

Study Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include the population sample, location of the research, and the time of data collection. As is recommended with basic interpretive design, participants were intentionally selected from multiple schools and school systems based on their work with students with complex support needs included in the general education classroom. This represents a delimitation because the participants have been selected for their work in inclusive practices and cannot be representative of all staff members and schools. The scope of the study will focus on a small number of staff members working in inclusive school settings with students with complex support needs. Participants were selected based on their experiences with students with disabilities

included in the general education classroom and their willingness to participate in the study.

Study Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small sample size from both elementary and secondary levels, which limited the ability to engage in generalization of data, as well as the purposeful selection of participants, which limited the applicability of data to other school districts. Additionally, this study was limited by the small number of schools and districts implementing inclusive educational practices, making it difficult to recruit participants. Few teachers are including students with complex support needs in the areas of behavior, health or physical needs, or cognitive needs, which limited the number of available participants. The unique characteristics and traits of each student also presented as a limitation because no two students are the same or have the same needs. For this reason, each teacher had to approach including their students differently to meet their individual needs. Additional limitations included the limited amount of time to engage with the inclusive setting and the limited abilities of the researcher to gather a significant amount of information. Despite these limitations, data from the study can inform future research focused on inclusion and inclusive practices.

Additionally, an unforeseen limitation of this research was the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic required nearly all schools in the United States to close for in-person learning. For this reason, all participants were unable to teach in person and were required to teach virtually. The model that was developed as a result of this research has limited applicability to the virtual setting, and would need to be further evaluated to determine how it can support students with complex needs learning in a virtual

environment. For students with multi-sensory needs, in-person learning may be required to support their access to the curriculum, and virtual learning may make it difficult for students to make progress in the area of social engagement.

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

The researcher approached this study from the perspective of an elementary school special education teacher with experience teaching students with complex support needs including those with deaf-blindness and cortical visual impairment, multiple and severe disabilities, physical disabilities, and significant behavior needs. During her years as a special education teacher, the researcher has become interested in access to the general education curriculum for students with complex needs and how it is facilitated. The researcher has worked to facilitate inclusion for students with complex support needs by providing material modifications as well as support within the general education classroom. The researcher's experiences in schools and with students with disabilities influenced both the research questions and purpose of this study. Additionally, the researcher has a degree in special education with specialties in autism and providing supports for students who access the alternative curriculum.

The researcher must be aware of perceptions that she has around the inclusion of students with complex support needs and ensure that it does not have an impact on participants' responses or perceptions. It should be noted, however, that the researcher was exploring experiences that may be similar to her own and must separate that experience. In order to document and recognize these perceptions and feelings, the researcher kept a journal throughout data collection and analysis. The implications of

this study included developing an understanding of how schools include students with complex support needs in the general curriculum as well as some facilitators and barriers.

Definition of Key Terms

Child with a Disability-

> The term "child with a disability" means a child—
>
> (i) with intellectual disability, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as "emotional disturbance"), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and
>
> (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 2004).

Complex support needs- needs that require intensive instruction in order for the student to learn effectively that may be related to the significance of the disability, significant interfering behaviors, trauma or neglect, or mental health difficulties (Dowse, et al., 2014).

General Curriculum- "the same curriculum used with children without disabilities adopted by a local educational agency, schools within the local educational agency or, where applicable, the Virginia Department of Education for all children from preschool through secondary school. The term relates to content of the curriculum and not to the setting in which it is taught" (VDOE, 2010, p. 5).

Inclusion- TASH (2013) defines inclusion as:

> the transformation of school communities based on social justice principles in which all students are (a) presumed competent, (b) are welcomed as valued members of all general education classes and extra-curricular activities in their local schools, (c) fully participate and learn alongside their same-age peers in general education instruction based on the general education curriculum and (d) experience reciprocal social relationships (TASH, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, students who spend 50% or more of their school day in the general education classroom were considered participants in inclusion.

Paraprofessional- an appropriately trained individual who is supervised by a special education teacher and can provide special education services to students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Related Service Provider- an adequately prepared and trained person with a license or certification in their area of expertise included but not limited to: speech-language pathology, audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, therapeutic recreation, counseling services, orientation and mobility services, medical and school health services, and social work services (IDEA, 2004).

Research-based Inclusive Practices- inclusive educational practices backed by current research in the field of special education

School Staff Members- individuals working within a school who have knowledge of the inclusive education program or those working in it.

General Education Teacher- a certified individual who is knowledgeable in content and able to provide instruction for students in grades 4-6.

Paraprofessional-“also known as paraeducator, means an appropriately trained employee who assists and is supervised by qualified professional staff in meeting the [special education] requirements…” (VDOE, 2010, p. 8).

Principal- a certified individual who functions as a program manager and evaluator for students in grades 4-6.

Related Service Provider- a certified individual providing additional wraparound services on a direct or consultative basis for a student with a disability. This can include physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, deaf and hard of hearing services, vision service, orientation and mobility services, counseling services, interpreting services, nursing services, and any other additional services required for a student to access his or her education.

Special Education Teacher- a certified individual who has knowledge and expertise in providing specially designed instruction to students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004).

Special Education- “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent(s), to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in a classroom, in the home, in hospitals, in institutions, and in other settings and in physical education” (VDOE, 2010, p. 10-11).

Overview of Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, a discussion of the research base and factors relating to inclusion was provided. This chapter also introduced the research questions and purpose that guided this study as well as the significance of the research to the field. The study’s conceptual framework, methodology, delimitations, limitations, and

a definition of terms that were used throughout the study were briefly summarized. In Chapter two, the literature review synthesizes literature focusing on inclusion and its outcomes as well as some of the facilitators and barriers to inclusion with consideration for their relevance to this research. Chapter three describes the basic interpretive design methodology and discusses the sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four provides an analysis of the results. Chapter five provides a discussion and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review sought to contextualize the study and provide background on research focused on inclusion for students with complex support needs. It sought to explore the following questions:

1. How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom?
2. What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to successful inclusion of students with complex support needs?
3. How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?

The review begins with a comprehensive review of literature search strategies and of current literature findings, moves to the explanation of a conceptual framework, and provides a brief summary of the literature review.

Overview of the Literature Search

Strategies

The literature review on this study focused on inclusion and students with complex support needs. In order to perform a comprehensive search of available literature, literature searches were conducted using available resources through George Washington University. Databases searched included Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and PsycINFO. The following search terms were used: ab (inclusion), ab (mainstream), ab (inclusive practices), and ab (inclusion AND severe disabilities). Scholarly, peer reviewed journals were given priority in this literature review, with opinions and editorials excluded from inclusion.

In order to expand the breadth of this current research, a search using Google was also conducted using the terms "inclusion," "full inclusion" and severe disabilities, "inclusion" and education, and "inclusive practices" and severe disabilities. In addition to these searches, hand searches of *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *Exceptional Children*, and *TEACHING Exceptional Children* were conducted with a focus on exploring research on inclusion and students with complex support needs. Throughout the search period, potential studies were reviewed by first looking for relevance in the title, and then scanning the abstract. After each article's relevance was determined, all citations were reviewed in order to search for other relevant research on the topic and a Web of Science or Google Scholar search was conducted to determine other research sources.

Inclusion

Allowing a student with disabilities to experience his education with same-age peers in the general education curriculum is called inclusion. Inclusion, defined by Guralnick in 2001, is "the planned participation between children with and without disabilities in the context of children's educational/developmental programs." In 1994, Mallory and New asserted that inclusion finds its roots in social constructivist theory, which argues the importance of sociocultural context in learning, the importance of social activity, and contributions from the learner. Social constructivist theory also assumes that all children, regardless of diagnosis or disability status, want to learn and develop, and that they will do so when given the appropriate environment (Mallory & New, 1994). The theory does not acknowledge any child's disability or "inability" to learn, but assumes that all children can learn. Social constructivist theory includes all children as active learners, and argues that they can contribute to the overall learning environment. Additionally, social constructivist theory emphasizes the role of the adult to change and develop his or her mindset in an effort to increase student learning (Mallory & New, 1994). Some of the benefits of inclusion include increased student achievement, acceptance of differences, friendship, a positive and supportive environment, collaborative teaming, and professional growth (Carter, et al., 2008; Cole, et al., 2004; Cosier, et al., 2013; Downing, et al., 2004). As research has shown that inclusion has benefits, the frequency and currency of research on the outcomes of inclusion has decreased.

Inclusion Defined

Inclusion can be divided into four types: full inclusion, the cluster model, reverse inclusion, and social inclusion. In 2001, Guralnick identified these four types of inclusion outlined in the chart below:

Table 1

Types of Inclusion

Type of Inclusion	Defining Features	Who's responsible?
Full Inclusion	Children with disabilities participate fully in the general education curriculum and in the same environment as their peers.	The general education teacher is fully responsible for the program, with consultation from the special education teacher and related service providers.
Cluster Model	A group of children with disabilities is placed into a program for typically developing children, but bring their own faculty with them.	The general education teacher is responsible for the program and classroom, but a special education teacher is present at all times and works exclusively with the children with disabilities.
Reverse Inclusion	Typically developing students are added to a special education classroom, reaching 25-40% of the total number of students in the class.	The special education teacher is responsible for all aspects of the program and generally all staff are special education staff.
Social Inclusion	Programs for students with and without disabilities are kept separate but occur in the same location, with planned interactions happening during social times including recess and other leisure-type activities.	All staff are responsible for their respective students.

TASH defines inclusion as:

> the transformation of school communities based on social justice principles in which all students are (a) presumed competent, (b) are welcomed as valued members of all general education classes and extra-curricular activities in their local schools, (c) fully participate and learn alongside their same-age peers in general education instruction based on the general education curriculum and (d) experience reciprocal social relationships (TASH, 2013).

While there is no widely accepted definition of inclusion (Baaken, 2010), this study will consider full inclusion to mean that students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom for 50% or more of the school day. The 50% definition was utilized in part because of the difficulty in finding participants who work with students with complex support needs. There are few teachers working to include students with complex support needs, and even fewer students who are included. In order to find accessible participants, teachers working with students who are included for 50% of the school day were selected.

Historical Policy Around Inclusion

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA (2004) aims to protect the rights of children and families with disabilities and special education needs and provide direction for educational agencies at multiple levels to assist them with providing students with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Early childhood education objectives, along with teacher preparation and accountability are also discussed.

IDEA (2004) contains a distinct provision that requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE provision

within IDEA has been a part of the legislation in some form or another since its introduction in 1975. The most recent reauthorization of IDEA occurred in 2004. The LRE provision states that:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, 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 regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004).

In addition to defining the least restrictive environment, the legislation also determines that funding means cannot disobey the LRE provision or be tied to the placement of a student in a way that violates that student's right to a FAPE. The right to be educated in the LRE is a protection provided to all students with disabilities receiving services under the IDEA. While it is important to note that IDEA (2004) does not use the word "inclusion" specifically, it has been used as a rationale for inclusion of students with disabilities because of its focus on the education of students with their peers.

Department of Education Guidance

In addition to the IDEA statute, there have also been numerous guiding documents released by the United States Department of Education and other agencies. *Dear Colleague Letters*, in particular, have helped to clarify the suggested interpretations of the law (https://ifap.ed.gov/ifap/byYear.jsp?type=dpcletters, retrieved 14 March 2019). With regards to preschool age students, The Office of Special Education Programs

(OSEP) has suggested that students in early childhood programs with disabilities should be educated alongside their same-age peers. They have also issued guidance that suggests that other placements outside of placement within the local school district should be explored for early childhood students with disabilities. States are responsible for ensuring a continuum of services is offered to all students, even those at early childhood stages (Musgrove, 2012). Updates to this guidance regarding early childhood education for students with disabilities have reaffirmed the right of preschool students with disabilities to be educated in the LRE and advised that the first placement option should always be the general education classroom with supports (Ryder, 2017). In the K-12 education arena, OSEP policy guidance has also responded to specific questions regarding residential facilities and LRE preferences for students living in those facilities to indicate that students should still be educated in the LRE, and that the first option should be the school that the child would attend if he or she were not disabled (Musgrove, 2011).

Case Law

This preference for placement at the school that the child would attend if he or she were not disabled has been well documented, however judicial holdings on the matter have yielded mixed interpretations with variances and inconsistencies therein. Currently, there is no legal precedent with respect to LRE established. Of five cases dating from 2005-2010 reviewed regarding LRE, two cases ruled for a less restrictive placement and three ruled in favor of a more restrictive placement (TEAL, 2013). In Pachl v. Seagren (2006) the United States Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit, ruled that a child can place a student in an alternate placement if the child will not receive educational benefit from the

general education environment with aids and services. The child under consideration had a variety of disabilities including epilepsy, autism, hearing loss, scoliosis, and Dandy Walker Syndrome. Historically, in A.S. by Mr. and Mrs. S. v. Norwalk Bd. of Educ. (2002), the District Court of Connecticut ruled that the school district should have considered providing supplementary services and supports for a student with visual and neurological impairments within the general education setting before sending a student to a more restrictive setting. Finally, in 1997 in the case of Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills Public Schools, the court held that a child with an intellectual disability could be placed in a functional classroom instead of a general education placement because her education is intended to give her skills to live independently in her community.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990, and works to ensure that people with disabilities do not experience discrimination across all areas of public domain, including schools (ADA, 1990). Title II of the ADA requires public entities, including schools, to provide individuals with disabilities with access to any programs or services being held on-site at their location (ADA, 1990). This may include ramps, automatic doors, and larger restrooms. Additionally, the law requires that reasonable modifications and accommodations be made for those that request them in order to avoid discrimination (ADA, 1990). The ADA applies to schools and inclusion because of its provisions around providing environmental access and against discrimination because of disability.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 was passed in the 1970s, and is complemented by the ADA by ensuring that programs receiving federal aid cannot discriminate against individuals with disabilities (Taylor, 2011). Students can receive services under Section 504 through a 504 Plan, which functions similarly to an IEP and notes the accommodations that a student may need while also documenting other important needs relating to the child's disability (Taylor, 2011). In addition to the 504 Plan, Section 504 also calls for a student to receive a FAPE in the LRE (Taylor, 2011). Students whose disabilities do not warrant an IEP may receive services under Section 504 in the school system (Taylor, 2011).

Outcomes of Inclusion

Students with Disabilities

For many years, the literature has been heavily focused on outcomes of inclusion for students with disabilities (Jorgensen, 2017; Carter, et al., 2008; Cole, et al., 2004; Cosier, et al., 2013; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992; Jackson, et al., 2010; Sermier Dessemontet, et al., 2012) and recently there has been a shift towards focusing on how to do inclusion (Sweigart & Landr 2015; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007; Lee, et al., 2010; Courtade, et al., 2015; Hudson, et al., 2013; Cohen & Demchak, 2018; Dettmer et al., 2000; & Jaime & Knowlten, 2007).

Inclusive education practices have been shown to be valuable for all students with disabilities regardless of the severity or impact of the disability, diagnosis, and demographic characteristics (Jorgensen, 2017). Segregated environments, by comparison, have no research documenting their effectiveness over an inclusive classroom environment (Kluth, 2019; Favley, et al., 2000). Specific benefits for students with disabilities include instructional as well as social and functional benefits. Overall research has shown that students with disabilities make as much or more progress in the

general education classroom when compared to students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms (Cosier, et al., 2013; Cole, et al., 2004).

When considering math and reading achievement in traditional versus inclusive classrooms, students in inclusive settings made more academic progress than their peers with disabilities in self-contained classrooms on the Basic Academic Skills Sample (BASS). The BASS is an assessment administered in groups that assesses student skills in mathematics and reading (Cole, et al., 2004). When measuring student progress on this assessment, the progress of students in one study was comparable to or greater than the progress made by their peers without disabilities (Cole, et al., 2004). When specifically considering students with intellectual disabilities, research has shown that these students made more progress than their peers in self-contained programs in the area of literacy skills (Sermier Dessemontet, et al., 2012). There were no observed differences in math or adaptive behavior, however authors concluded that "inclusion seems to allow children with IDs to make either as much, or more, progress in their academic achievement and adaptive behavior than separate educational settings" (Sermier Dessemontet, et al., 2012, p. 581). Some research has also shown a positive relation between the hours that students with disabilities spend in the general education classroom and reading and mathematics achievement (Cosier, et al., 2013).

While there are documented academic benefits, social benefits have also been observed for individuals with disabilities, noting that students with disabilities in inclusive environments are more likely to develop friendships and have improved social communications and opportunities when they are involved in the general education curriculum regardless of severity of disability (Carter, et al., 2008; Copeland & Cosbey,

2009; Jackson, et al., 2009). Some research has shown that students with disabilities were able to form lasting friendships that continued over time and included out of school activities (Carter, et al., 2016; Carter, et al., 2008). Functional benefits for students educated in inclusive environments have also been documented, with students in inclusive settings showing more achievement and mastery in the area of adaptive and functional behaviors and independent living skills when compared to students with disabilities educated in segregated settings (Woodman, et al., 2016; Cole, et al., 2004; Gupta, et al., 2014). Overall, general education settings are more advantageous for students with disabilities (Jackson, et al., 2010).

Despite these documented outcomes, students with disabilities continue to be placed in segregated settings at a rate that did not change over a ten-year period (2004-2014) despite the cultural push towards inclusion (Kurth, et al., 2014). Students with low incidence disabilities, specifically, are more likely to be placed in segregated and residential or hospital-type settings when compared to students with other types of disabilities (Kurth, et al., 2014). Students with multiple disabilities and emotional behavioral disabilities are most likely to be segregated, and disability label does seem to be a factor in placement (Kurth, et al., 2014). However, research has shown that level of inclusion is not a function of political affiliation, the educational level of a state is not indicative of inclusion and inclusion is not a function of state finances (Westling, 2018). This is important to understand because special education is very costly. In 2004, the average cost of special education for one student was $16, 921, an extra $9,369 per year when compared to students without disabilities (NEA, 2004). In California, special education costs have increased exponentially, with a 65% increase in special education

costs between 2012 and 2017 (Srikrishnan, 2018). Statewide expenditures increased by 55% from 2005 to 2015 (Srikrishnan, 2018). While there is no current agreed upon data on special education costs, the costs of educating a typically developing student increased to $11,454 per year (Cornman, et al., 2018). It can be assumed that the increase in average cost of educating a student without a disability may be similar to the increase in educating a student with a disability, which indicates that special education costs are rising. According to Jorgensen (2017), there is no research supporting better outcomes for students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms when compared to inclusive placements.

Typically Developing Peers

Similar to results for students with disabilities, research has shown that inclusion does not limit educational chances or academic achievement for peers in included classrooms (Demeris, et al., 2007). When considering specific disabilities, research has also shown that including students with intellectual disabilities in the general education classroom has no negative impact on students without disabilities (Sermier-Dessemontet & Bless, 2013). With regards to standardized testing, schools employing inclusive practices have shown increased student growth on state assessments when compared to schools with a traditional education model (Choi, et al., 2016). In addition to standardized test scores, students without disabilities were also able to make statistically significant gains in both math and reading when assessed using the BASS when they were educated in inclusive settings (Cole, et al., 2004). This supports the notion that inclusion and inclusive practices do not negatively influence the academic performance of students without disabilities in inclusive settings.

Research has also shown that inclusive education has enhanced the social skills of typically developing students by making them more aware of the needs of others and understanding the behaviors of individuals with disabilities, as well as creating lasting relationships (Carter,et al., 2016). There have also been documented changes in peers with regards to self-esteem, friendships, morals and ethics, tolerance, and comfort level with individuals with disabilities as a result of inclusive education practices (Shogren, et al., 2015; Staub, 2005; Peck et al., 2004). Students without disabilities reported feeling a sense of belonging in their schools as well as the importance of learning to socialize with others who may be different from themselves (Shogren, et al., 2015).

This is supported by research focusing on the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities, which has come to the conclusion that there are no statistically significant effects on students without disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Ruijs, 2017). Through the use of a meta-analysis, Szumski, et al. (2017) found that there is an overall statistically significant positive effect on the academic achievement of students without disabilities. It is also important to note that a literature review focusing on the impact of placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom found that there were no adverse effects on students without disabilities (Kalambouka, et al., 2007). In 81% of the literature reviewed by Kalambouka's group, there were positive or neutral effects on students without disabilities, which resulted in the conclusion that placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom is not likely to have a negative impact on typically developing peers in terms of social or academic outcomes and that the majority of effects on students without disabilities were neutral.

Studies involving parent perceptions found similar results, with the majority of parents in one study indicating that they believed that their child benefited from the opportunity, and 93% of participants indicating a small or positive effect (Peck, et al., 2004). Despite overall positive or neutral experiences reported by parents of typically developing children, parents did report that their child may have received less attention from the teacher and that their students may have witnessed some negative behaviors (Sira, et al., 2018; Peck et al., 2004). While some parents, 22%, believed that their student's individual time with the teacher decreased, the majority of parent participants also believed that their child had an increased understanding of the needs of others and an increased acceptance of others as a result of being in an inclusive classroom (Peck, et al., 2004). Still other parents felt that the experience was negative and that they would not want to enroll their students in an inclusive classroom again, though this was the minority (Peck, et al., 2004). It is important to note that research on parents in general has shown that parents are generally positive about inclusion for students with disabilities overall, but that they were most negative about the inclusion of students with profound or multiple disabilities (de Boer & Munde, 2014).

Facilitators and Barriers of Inclusion

When considering inclusion for students with disabilities, there are many barriers cited as arguments against inclusion. These facilitators and barriers occur at numerous levels including the school level, school leaders, and staff.

Schools

Schools can provide support for inclusion by providing supports for student participation through staffing, grouping, peer-supports, and core academics (Morningstar,

et al., 2015). They can also ensure the use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), behavior interventions, and accommodations/ modifications to encourage learning for all students (Morningstar, et al., 2015).

A successful inclusive school requires many components, including parent involvement, faculty and staff involvement, beliefs, individualization, and additional enrichment opportunities (Downing, et al., 2004). Additionally, an inclusive school must be focused on meeting the needs of all students (McClesky, et al., 2012) and have a culture that promotes inclusive practices and an inclusive culture (Francis, et al., 2016). In a study involving six inclusive schools, each school engaged in practices that were firmly rooted in the culture of the school, which posited that inclusion was not negotiable and all staff were expected to comply with the inclusive policy and practice expectations (Shogren, et al., 2015).

Often, schools do not have the supports they need (Halle & Dymond, 2008) and space and materials (Pivik, et al., 2002; Stanton- Chaman & Schmidt, 2016), attitudes (Pivik, et al., 2002), transportation (Graham, et al., 2014; Downing, et al., 2004), student behavior (Baaken, 2010), and curriculum (Baaken, 2010; Halle & Dymond, 2008) present challenges in the implementation of inclusion at the school level, along with funding (Downing, et al., 2004).

Physical Space Access

When students and families were asked about barriers to inclusion, they cited environmental issues including physical barriers such as stairs and other inaccessible features that were too small or too high (Pivik, et al., 2002). When asked to provide solutions, the students and parents suggested environmental modifications such as

changing the physical building (Pivik, et al., 2002). In a study of Virginia teachers, teachers indicated that their students could not participate on the playground fully, with some teachers trying to overcome the barriers by removing their students from their wheelchairs so that they could attempt to participate (Stanton- Chaman & Schmidt, 2016). They also indicated that there is a need for a peer buddy program on the playground and demonstrated a vision for a fully inclusive playground that would provide their students with access (Stanton-Chapman & Schmidt, 2016). Students in Canada were surveyed on accessibility, and 24% of students indicated that their school did not have smooth and level walkways that permitted easy entry (Stephens, et al. 2015). Students reported other barriers to access entry to schools including a lack of automatic doors, stairs to enter certain areas, narrow hallways, and broken elevators. Many participants also indicated that access to toileting was difficult, as well as general access to the classroom. Barriers to access made it difficult for students to access the physical environment as well as the social environment that comes with attending school with one's peers (Stephens, et al., 2015).

Perceptions

In a study of teachers with varying amounts of teaching experience, results indicated that the majority of participants reported positive feelings about inclusive education and that they thought it was a good idea (Andrade, 2018). In the same study, participants indicated that they understood how they could modify instruction but that they did not understand the educational needs of students with disabilities. When considering special education placements, 21% of those surveyed indicated that they felt traditional special education settings would be better for students with disabilities

(Andrade, 2018). This is important to understand because students cited institutional and attitudinal issues as barriers to inclusive education, including isolation, bullying, and lack of understanding or knowledge about their needs and disabilities (Pivik, et al., 2002). Policy and social changes such as disability awareness activities are suggested as solutions to help alleviate some of these difficulties. It may also be likely that providing resources to schools could be an effective solution (Pivik, et al., 2002).

In a study from Kurth and Forber-Pratt (2017), the majority of participants held a neutral stance on inclusive education, which presents difficulties because teachers need to work as a team to transform the educational system. Teachers also had limited understandings of inclusion as more than a time or place (Kurth & Forber-Pratt, 2017). When considering prior experiences of teachers and the impact of those experiences on dispositions toward inclusion, research has shown that coursework and field experience is more important (Bialka, 2017). This highlights the need for teacher preparation programs that provide coursework and fieldwork in inclusive education (Bialka, 2017).

Transportation

Transportation has been cited as a challenge for students with disabilities (Graham, et al., 2014; Downing, et al., 2004). While transportation for students with disabilities is mandated by law, adequate transportation is not always provided and may be associated with significant stress (Graham, et al., 2014). In a survey of parents of children with disabilities, parents indicated that there were multiple issues around the topic of transportation that presented a challenge in school attendance and belonging. These included assistants and aides, being denied access to programs, difficulties with the schedule, materials that are broken or do not work, and safety (Graham, et al., 2014).

Parents indicated that aides, or paraprofessionals hired to care for children with more significant needs, were negligent towards their children; were unable to attend to personal care needs due to gender differences; and that there was significant turnover among aides (Graham et al., 2014). There were also concerns with aides being overburdened by too many students or being absent in general (Graham, et al., 2014). They also discussed the fact that their children were unable to attend after school activities due to a lack of transportation as well as an inability to attend school trips because accessible buses were not available. Additionally, parents mentioned that their children were not able to attend specific classes because of the time that their bus was scheduled (Graham, et al., 2014). This scheduling difficulty was not uncommon, with some parents citing scheduling as a significant difficulty that led to inconsistent times for drop-off and pick-up as well as long wait times. In terms of materials, many straps and other equipment were defective or broken, or staff did not know how to use them (Graham, et al., 2014). The last and most serious transportation concern focused on student safety, and parents cited multiple incidents where the physical safety of their children was compromised including failure to use wheelchair brakes or chairs falling over (Graham, et al., 2014).

Student Behavior

Concerns about students disrupting other members of the class and making it difficult for other students to learn have been cited as barriers to inclusion (Baaken, 2010). Students with disabilities may show off-task behavior or other problem behaviors throughout the school day (Yildiz, 2015). According to Murphy (2009), "people with intellectual disabilities who show challenging behavior…often make other people

uncomfortable so that social inclusion is more difficult, and evidence suggests that both children and adults with intellectual disabilities and challenging behavior (and their families) have poorer quality of life and more restrictions in their lives than others with intellectual disabilities" (p.89).

Schoolwide positive behavior intervention and supports (SWPBS) has been cited as a way to encourage positive behavior for all students in the school system and may help to alleviate some of the negative behaviors of students with and without disabilities (Kurth & Enyart, 2016). In a study from Bradshaw, et al., (2014) looking at the effectiveness of school-wide programs, researchers found that children who were at risk or at high risk had a higher effect with the school-wide PBIS system as compared to the comparison schools.

While there have been some interventions used to help teachers better manage the behavior of students with disabilities, teachers require training and professional development to help build their capacity in behavior management. While behavior is a barrier to inclusive education, it becomes a bigger barrier for teachers who are not properly trained on how to implement behavior management procedures.

Curriculum

Often, teachers of students with complex support needs may see curricular access as the alternate assessment that students with disabilities take, viewing the standards, IEP goals, and alternate assessment curriculum as separate items that need to be taught (Peterson, 2016). Teachers in self-contained classrooms demonstrate confusion around the logistics of curricular access including how to teach their students and the pace of instruction (Peterson, 2016). Teachers may also believe that students are too low

academically and assign them work that has been significantly altered or have concerns about how students will participate in high-stakes testing (Baaken, 2010; Halle & Dymond, 2008). These barriers are most prevalent at the high school level as questions arise about the intensity of instruction and whether or not it can be provided in the general education classroom, who is responsible for progress monitoring, and the student's dependence on a paraprofessional (Baaken, 2010).

Additionally, there is a lack of coordination between general education and special education teachers (Nilsen, 2017). General education teachers indicate that special education teachers do not help to create adapted work plans for students with disabilities, and special education teachers report that general education teachers do not help to create IEPs or consider the goals in their creation or work plans (Nilsen, 2017).

Staff

Staff in an inclusive school need to be committed to giving students access and engage in shared responsibility among special education and general education teachers (Olson, et al., 2016). One of the important concepts cited as being a facilitator of inclusion is the use of well-trained and competent staff (Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007). School staff that are well-trained can create opportunities for learning and making progress, socializing with peers, and building relationships (Olson, et al., 2016). It is suggested that teacher preparation programs begin to send teachers to courses that provide background information on disabilities and explain teacher responsibilities, focus on strategies and instructional practices as well as behavior management, and technology (Goldstein, et al., 2013).

Staff who are effective at implementing inclusive practices are also able to modify and make existing grade-level curriculum accessible while using a variety of teaching situations to meet the needs of their students (Olson, et al., 2016). Studies have also indicated that collaboration and teaming is vital in the implementation of inclusive practices (Olson, et al., 2015; Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007; Jackson, et al., 2000; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). Across program instruction is most effective in supporting the needs of students with disabilities (Hunt, et al., 2001). Collaborative teaching and collaborative practices across the school are also important and promote student success (Shogren, et al., 2015).

School Leadership

Principal leadership is profoundly important in the implementation of inclusive practices and is imperative as schools make the transformation to inclusive environments (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). In fact, some school stakeholders feel that the principal is the key to success because he is able to develop and maintain an organizational structure that supports inclusion (Shogren, et al., 2015). Principals must have a vision for the school community and move the school towards that vision (Haines, et al., 2015). They must also understand that inclusive practices are at the heart of practice (Kozleski, et al., 2015). Scheduling is also one of the most important roles of the school administrator (Canady, 2019). Administrators have the ability to creatively consider the needs of students when establishing a schedule so that students with a variety of needs can be successful (Canady, 2019).

Research from Kozleski, et al. (2015) has found that focus groups feel that school leaders must work to build capacity in their schools, be committed to the cause, and

recognize that inclusive practices are at the foundation of the school. Administrators must also be flexible and efficient, utilize shared decision making, and make data-informed decisions (McClesky, et al. 2012). School leaders must also promote a culture of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010), provide leadership for instruction, model collaboration; conduct administrative processes, and develop positive relationships with stakeholders (DiPaola, et al., 2004).

Principal leadership can predict teacher attitudes, so principals should help develop and monitor the knowledge and skills of their staff, work to create common expectations on implementation of skills and knowledge, and promote an inclusive school culture (DiPaola, et al., 2004). With the understanding that the principal sets the stage for success, it is important for school leaders to communicate with families, show dedication in the hiring process, model behaviors and expectations, engage in distributed leadership practices, and provide opportunities for parents to be engaged with the school (Francis, et al., 2016). Meaningful principals help parents to feel as though they are partners in decision making (Francis, et al., 2016).

In one study of a principal who had a record of success in changing a school to make it more inclusive, researchers discovered that the principal believed that his role was to provide the foundation for teachers to help them be their best, and demonstrated that by trusting teachers, listening to their concerns, treating staff fairly, using data to make decisions, and building partnerships in community (Hoppey & McClesky, 2013). In addition, the principal promoted teacher growth by providing professional development opportunities and allowing leadership opportunities for staff (Hoppey & McClesky, 2013).

Administrators also have a vision of instruction for students with complex support needs that is centered on their perceptions of teacher expertise (Roberts, et al., 2018). They are also open and willing to jump-in to situations involving students as needed (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). School administrators expect teachers to be good citizens and contribute to the school environment, believe that expert teachers are able to manage both staff and students, are positive, have the ability to shape behavior and communication, act as a caregiver for their students, and can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of their students (Roberts, et al., 2018).

Professional Development

In order for teachers to be effective, they must be prepared for the duties and expectations of an inclusive classroom (Zagona, et al., 2017; Mader, 2017; McClesky & Waldron, 2002). However, effective professional development needs to be school-specific and a part of the school plan for improvement, with initial professional development focusing on the attitudes and beliefs held by school staff around inclusion (McClesky & Wahldron, 2002). It is also important that professional development focus on meeting the needs of all students, not just students with disabilities (McClesky & Waldron, 2002). Caseload also has an influence on teachers' provision of effective special education services and feelings of burnout (Giangreco, et al., 2011).

In addition to professional development, teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers to work in inclusive classroom settings and with students who have disabilities (Zagona, et al., 2017; Allday, et al., 2013; Goldstein, et al., 2013). When reviewing the curricula and content of teacher preparation programs, they are largely focused on disability characteristics and some classroom management tactics (Allday, et

al., 2013). Programs are missing a focus on how to provide instruction for students with disabilities through strategies such as differentiation and information on how to collaborate with other professionals, with only 7 to 10% of coursework focusing on inclusion and students with disabilities (Allday, et al., 2013). Some teachers report that they have never had to take a class on students with disabilities and they were forced to figure out what to do on the job (Mader, 2017). There is a documented relationship between the preparedness of teachers to work in inclusive education environments and their coursework or training in inclusive education (Zagona, et al., 2017). Teachers who participated in university coursework were more prepared to individualize instruction, accommodate students, and make adaptations for standards of learning (Zagona, et al., 2017).

In one study of student teachers, 94% of student teachers studied indicated that there were students with disabilities in their classrooms (Goldstein, et al., 2013). When considering the number of students with disabilities, 28% of participants indicated that they had 7 or more students with disabilities in their classes (Goldstein, et al., 2013). The authors indicated that the increase in inclusive practices and increasing numbers of students with disabilities "suggest that general education teachers not only need to have a general knowledge of inclusive practices but may need more specific knowledge regarding the nature and needs of specific disabilities and specific skills in making appropriate classroom and curriculum accommodations for individual needs" (Goldstein, et al., 2013, p. 562).

With this in mind, it is important to recognize that teacher preparation programs can represent both a facilitator and a barrier of inclusion, depending on the level of

preparation that teachers receive. It is suggested that teacher preparation programs begin to send teachers to courses that provide background information on disabilities and explain teacher responsibilities, focus on strategies and instructional practices as well as behavior management, and technology (Mader, 2017; Goldstein, et al., 2013). At Syracuse University, for example, students who graduate with an elementary or early-childhood degree also take coursework in special education, which prepares them to teach any student who comes into their classroom (Mader, 2017).

Specific instructional strategies, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are starting to be taught in teacher preparation programs, which is an instructional strategy that focuses on providing students with multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression, and multiple means of engagement (Vitelli, 2015). While many programs indicate that they teach all three areas of UDL, the depth of instruction seems to be low (Vitelli, 2015). The professors teaching preparation coursework were surveyed, and 60% indicated that they had an awareness of UDL while 72.29% of those who were aware of UDL were able to demonstrate correct knowledge (Vitelli, 2015). As teacher preparation programs continue to prepare teachers who were working in inclusive settings, it was important for universities to begin to incorporate UDL into their programs on a deeper level (Vitelli, 2015).

Teachers

Teachers of students with disabilities must also have the ability to have a positive attitude about their students. Research has shown that teachers have different perceptions towards students with disabilities and that even those with inclusive experience regard their included students with concern instead of attachment, indifference, or rejection

(Cook, et al., 2000). Other research has shown that teachers' prior experience with people with disabilities is related to more positive affective attitudes around inclusion when compared to those who have not had prior experience (Dias & Cadime, 2015). It is important to note, however, that teachers working in inclusive schools had an overall positive perception of inclusion (Dias & Cadime, 2015). Research focusing on one elementary school in Florida has shown that teachers providing instruction to older elementary school grades and those with fewer years of teaching had a higher average score for positive attitudes towards inclusion then those with younger grades or more teaching experience (Barnes & Gaines, 2015). Teachers also indicated having apprehension around meeting the needs of their students with disabilities because of a lack of experience and having heard information from other teachers, however teachers who were also certified in special education felt more confident in their abilities to teach students with disabilities (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). From the perspective of teachers, school-level support and situation-level support were helpful in managing difficult situations with students, and in-class supports were important to the success of the classroom (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006).

Some of the difficulties that teachers may experience include planning for the student and implementing strategies while balancing the needs of other students, adapting materials, conflicts with parents, and differing opinions of school staff (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). Teachers indicated that they needed for people to listen to them during these challenges and provide interpersonal supports but that they resolved these issues by having high expectations, modifying the curriculum so that students could participate,

being flexible, being positive, trying to understand the student, and providing behavioral supports for the student (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006).

Quality teachers of students with disabilities are able to demonstrate advocacy for their students, create an emphasis on academics and systematic instruction, provide their students with individualization and adaptation, and develop strong relationships between teachers (Ruppar, et al., 2017). Teachers must also be flexible and strive to make improvements for their students and their learning (Ruppar, et al., 2017).

Collaboration

Teacher collaboration is important and effective in inclusive classrooms (Bull-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Evans & Weiss, 2014). Good collaboration involves timely follow-up with other team members based on informal conversations and other student concerns (Evans & Weiss, 2014). Time for both formal and informal collaboration is integral in planning for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Olson & Ruppar, 2017). A lack of time for collaboration has been cited as a barrier to effective inclusion in schools (Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Evans & Weiss, 2014; Baaken, 2010; Downing, et al., 2004). In one study, teachers who did not have enough time for collaboration were unable to meet the needs of their students in the general education classroom (Olson & Ruppas, 2017). Co-teachers, especially, require time for collaboration so that they can effectively work together to provide instruction for students (Sweigart & Landr 2015).

Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are an increasingly large part of the day of students with disabilities, and research has shown that they are able to implement evidence-based

practices when they are shown videos of how to implement the practice as well as provided with in-person feedback based on observations (Brock, et al., 2017). This can benefit students with disabilities because it provides them with qualified staff members who are competent and able to facilitate evidence-based practices effectively (Brock, et al., 2017). Other research has shown that paraprofessionals can be taught to use Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT) and generalized its implementation across settings after being trained and provided with feedback (Feldman & Matos, 2012). It is important to note, however, that one cannot consider a small amount of training to be absolute competence and that paraprofessionals require ongoing monitoring and supervision, along with instructional direction from teachers (Giangreco & Hoza, 2013).

Paraprofessionals, while a facilitator of inclusion, have also been seen as a barrier to inclusion (Moshe & Licht, 2016; Downing, et al., 2004). Many assistants come into their positions without adequate training or the ability to understand and meet their job description (Moshe & Licht, 2016).

Strategies for Inclusion

A highly effective inclusive school focuses on meeting the needs of all students through high-quality instruction and provides students with disabilities with supports as a natural part of the school environment (McClesky, et al., 2012). As inclusion has become a more prominent feature of the school system, there have been many strategies posited as ways to help students with complex support needs make progress in the general education classroom and curriculum. Some promising work has suggested a sequential process for providing students with access to the general education curriculum that involves first identifying content standards, determining what students need to learn,

creating instructional activities, and then choosing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives that align with the unit (Clayton, et al., 2006). A similar process was proposed by Cushing, et al. (2005) first identifying standards of learning, then setting expectations for the classroom, incorporating IEP goals, conducting classroom observation, adapting work, and planning for the assessment of student learning. These procedures can be used as a framework to guide the work accommodation and modification processes.

One teaching strategy commonly used with students with disabilities is co-teaching, which focuses on the use of two teachers, often one special education teacher and one general education teacher instructing a class of students with and without disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). It was first introduced by Cook and Friend (1995) and is used in many classrooms today (Sweigart & Landr 2015). Co-taught classrooms have increased opportunities to respond, provided students with positive feedback, and shown multiple types of student instruction (Sweigart & Landr 2015). An important strategy for effective inclusion in the general education classroom is curriculum modifications and accommodations, with an understanding that school staff need to be flexible and create a variety of materials (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007). When students are provided with curriculum modifications, they are able to be active participants in their education and engage fewer challenging behaviors (Lee, et al., 2010). Curricular modifications seem to be a strong predictor of student outcomes, with research indicating that when students were not provided with modifications (even if doing off-grade work) they were likely to engage in behaviors (Lee, et al., 2010).

Other general strategies for including students with disabilities include making intentional choices about the classroom in which students are placed and using hands-on learning as well as cooperative learning strategies to encourage progress (Downing & Eichinger, 2003). In a second study from Downing and Eichinger (2011) research indicated that some of the best practices for instructing students who are deaf-blind include collaboration, intentional student groupings, material modification, and small-group instruction.

Preteaching is a strategy typically reserved for a specific group of students, whether it is a group of students with special education or other needs (Smets & Struyven, 2018). Preteaching has been described as a teaching strategy that can allow students to further develop their listening comprehension skills or learn necessary content information before learning the core content (Munk, et al., 2010). It can consist of teaching vocabulary or using advanced organizers, which can include graphic organizers, summaries of content to be learned, or other creative ways of introducing content to students (Smets & Struyven, 2018).

While suggestions and ideas about strategies for inclusive instruction continue to emerge, it is important to use evidence-based practices with students who have complex support needs and severe disabilities (Courtade, et al., 2015). The use of embedded instruction trials with constant time delay has been shown to function as an evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities (Hudson, et al., 2013). Another strategy that has some research base is the use of visual supports (Cohen & Demchak, 2018; Dettmer et al., 2000; Jaime & Knowlten, 2007). When students with moderate and severe disabilities were provided with visual supports to complete a complex task and

systematic teaching of how to use the visual supports, their ability to complete tasks independently in the general education classroom increased (Cohen & Demchak, 2018). One student working on typing sentences averaged 24.3% independence across baseline, moved to 64% once the visual support was introduced, and averaged 92% independence after explicit instruction on the use of visuals (Cohen & Demchak, 2018). Overall, results indicated that students with severe disabilities could be taught task independence with visual supports taught explicitly (Cohen & Demchak, 2018).

Response cards have also been used to promote responding and on-task behavior for students with disabilities and have been successful across educational settings (Clarke, et al., 2016; Randolph, 2007). Response cards allow students to respond to teacher questions using pre-created cards or a dry erase board that have answers from which the student can choose to hold up in response to a teacher question (Randolph, 2007). Response cards have been shown to increase student on-task behavior and active responding as compared to hand-raising (Clarke, et al., 2016).

Mathematics

Mathematics instruction for students with complex support needs and severe disabilities may be difficult because students are still learning early numeracy concepts but the learning standards and objectives are focused on complex mathematics concepts (Browder, et al., 2012). Due to the fact that many students are continuing to learn early numeracy skills, there is a need for the teaching of grade-level math content and early numeracy skills to be taught concomitantly. One strategy that may benefit students with complex support needs is the use of math stories to help give real-world meaning to concepts through the use of scripted lessons that are story-based and promote

generalization (Browder, et al., 2012). In addition to using stories to teach numeracy concepts, classroom staff can work to embed early numeracy concepts into the grade level content (ex. using a grade level worksheet while focusing on number identification) so that students continue to get repeated exposure to important concepts (Browder, et al., 2012). The use of calculators has also been shown to help students with disabilities in math class who have math calculation difficulties (Faragher, et al., 2017). Accommodations such as these are listed on student IEPs in a specific section of the document and serve as a guide for teachers when they are providing students with work or instruction.

Additionally, in one study, 94% of teachers found value in utilizing manipulatives to teach students math concepts (Jimenez & Stanger, 2017). Despite this understanding, many students had difficulties utilizing manipulatives and instead preferred to engage with technology such as the iPad or Smartboard. This led the authors to make recommendations including the use of virtual manipulatives (Jimenez & Stanger, 2017).

Reading

In order to support literacy instruction, multiple evidence-based practices have been identified including massed trial training, constant time delay, and systematic prompting (Browder, et al., 2006). Other practices include the use of pictures and functional use of concepts to promote generalization and use throughout one's environment (Browder, et al., 2006).

According to Erikson (2017), comprehensive literacy instruction, or multi-faceted instruction that focuses on emergent literacy skills, is important in teaching students with complex needs to read. This should include shared reading and writing, independent

reading and writing, alphabet knowledge, and phonological awareness and involve the use of all members of the student's educational team (Erikson, 2017). Similarly, Copeland, et al. (2018), recommend that a comprehensive model of literacy instruction is used. This model should include early literacy skills vocabulary skills, word recognition skills, comprehension skills, fluency, and writing (Copeland, et al., 2018).

Copeland, et al., (2018) also recommends that literacy instruction presume the competence of students with complex needs, include individualized and systematic instruction, utilize language and communication interventions, be developmentally appropriate, and include all of the core components of reading. One model of literacy that is related to this is the Four Blocks Model of Reading and Writing (Cunningham, et al., 1999). This model includes guided reading, self-selected reading, writing, and working with words. It has been used with students with disabilities through the incorporation of assistive technology, modifications and accommodations, and consideration of individual student needs (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2007).

Social Inclusion

Behavior

School-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) have been used as a strategy to help students with and without disabilities, and has been used with students with complex support needs and severe disabilities (Kurth & Enyart, 2016). SWPBS can have a significant impact on the success of inclusive education and help to further support for students with disabilities and the development of situations with positive teacher behaviors and environments (Kurth & Enyart, 2016). SWPBIS is a behavior management intervention that is intended to work for all students and create behavior

change. PBIS starts with the whole school participating and allows for individualized interventions within the system to promote behavior change for individual students. PBIS, called PBS in this study, is often used with children who exhibit repetitive behaviors. "The primary goal of PBS is to improve the quality of life for children by increasing their appropriate behaviors and adjusting the learning environment to prevent interfering behaviors from first occurring or re-occurring" (Neitzel, 2010, p. 248). PBIS is divided into three tiers of intervention. The first tier involves preventing maladaptive behaviors from occurring. This can be done by creating a learning environment high in quality, providing support and incentives for positive student behaviors in the classroom environment, and helping the child to develop communication and social skills (Neitzel, 2010).

Tier two is more of an intervention for behaviors that are already occurring. This tier often involves a functional behavioral assessment, behavior plans, and promoting the development of social skills. In this tier, many interventions are individualized and geared towards the individual student. After a behavioral assessment, evidence-based practices will often be introduced in order to help lessen the occurrence of the undesired behaviors. Tier three holds only individualized interventions and the interfering problems are highly problematic. During this tier a functional behavioral assessment can be used again. The interventions developed at the conclusion of the assessment was sophisticated and often more time consuming. Essentially, through the use of a PBIS system, positive behaviors of students with ASD are supported and interfering behaviors are addressed more effectively" (Neitzel, 2012, p. 254).

In addition to SWPBS, the use of a check-in/ check-out system (CICO) has been used to help encourage positive behavior (Maggin, et al., 2015). CICO contains five components including a morning check-in, a behavior chart or card that is used throughout the day, teacher feedback provided throughout the day, an afternoon check-out routine, and the communication of point card information to parents or guardians at home (Crone, et al., 2010). A review of the literature using CICO procedures has shown that it can be an effective tool when considering the function of the student's behavior (Maggin, et al., 2015). Specifically, research has shown that CICO can be used as an evidence-based strategy when behaviors are related to adult attention, and that CICO has worked to alleviate behaviors with other functions, however the research is not robust enough to consider this an evidence-based practice (Wolfe, et al., 2016).

Peer Supports

Peer supports have been posited as a way to promote inclusion and enhance success in the classroom (Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Carter, et al., 2015; Copeland & Coseby, 2010; Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Spooner, et al., 2006). Additionally, peer supports have been shown to increase the engagement of both students with and without disabilities and have a positive effect on students without disabilities (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). When peers who were trained and has facilitators to model strategies to use while working with students with disabilities to paraprofessional supports, research has shown an increase in interactions and in the number of peers with whom students interact, as well as an increase in engagement and active classroom participation (Carter, et al, 2015). Students also noted friendships that developed and were sustained over time, and there was a noticeable increase in progress towards social goals (Carter, et al.,

2015). The use of peers as tutors has also been shown to encourage interactions between students with and without disabilities and lead to increased social participation in inclusive classrooms (Garrote, et al., 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in systems theory, which argues that the school works as a system with multiple variables influencing the system as a whole so it cannot be studied as independent of its context (Skyttner, 2005). Systems theory, which argues that the school works as a system with multiple variables influencing the system as a whole so it cannot be studied as independent of its context (Skyttner, 2005). While there are many variables considered in the conceptual framework, this study specifically focuses on four school-based factors needed to support inclusion of students with disabilities that includes: policy implementation, interpersonal/relational factors, physical requirements, and pedagogy.

Normalization

Normalization is a principle intended to be applied to all people across societies and age groups regardless of their level of disability (Nirje, 1992). Normalization is defined as "making available to all persons those patterns of life and conditions of everyday living that are as close as possible to, or indeed the same as, the regular circumstances and ways of life of their communities and their culture" (Nirje, 1992). According to Wolfensberger (1970), normalization is applicable to all socially devalued groups and can be used to improve their lives.

It relates to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education setting because students are provided with an education in the least restrictive environment as

much as is possible. The principle of normalization can be a lens through which to view inclusion for students with complex support needs in the general education setting. While there are many variables considered in the conceptual framework, this study specifically focuses on the school-based factors including policy implementation at the local level, school leadership, teacher self-efficacy, student experiences, the physical aspects of the building, and pedagogical impacts.

Policy

The IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 contribute to the ability and legal precedent for students with disabilities to be included and provided with access to the general education curriculum and classroom with their peers (Taylor, 2011). The ADA and Section 504 function to prohibit discrimination and ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from settings that receive federal funding, including schools (Taylor, 2011). IDEA and Section 504 contain additional provisions around FAPE and LRE, which ensures that students receive an education in the least restrictive environment (Taylor, 2011; IDEA, 2004).

Interpersonal and Relational Factors

Bandura's Self- Efficacy Theory

One theory contributing to this conceptual framework is Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which was defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). This has been translated to apply to teachers with an understanding that teachers are also motivated and that their sense of self-efficacy can impact the learning of their students (Protheroe, 2008).

Teacher preparation programs must train teachers and prepare them to teach in inclusive classrooms, helping them to be confident and competent in their abilities to provide instruction for students with disabilities (Zagona, et al., 2017; Allday, et al., 2013; Goldstein, et al., 2013). When teachers feel confident and self-efficacious, it is likely that their practices and quality of instruction will reflect such feelings and may help to make inclusion more successful.

Educational Leadership

The importance of principal leadership in making inclusion successful cannot be understated. School administrators must have a vision for the school community and move the school towards that vision (Haines, et al., 2015) while understanding that inclusive practices are at the heart of practice (Kozleski, et al., 2015). A school culture of inclusion is vital, and school leaders must also promote a culture of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). With the understanding that the principal sets the stage for success, it is important for school leaders to communicate with families, show dedication in the hiring process, model behaviors and expectations, engage in distributed leadership practices, and provide opportunities for parents to be engaged with the school (Francis, et al., 2016).

Administrators who have a vision for all students, including those with disabilities, as well as an understanding of inclusion and its importance can be helpful in furthering the mission of inclusion. It is likely that schools using inclusive practices successfully will have a school administrator or leader embodying the attributes of a successful inclusive school leader.

Families

While there is little research on the role of families in inclusion, it is likely that parent advocacy plays an integral role in promoting access for students with disabilities. Some research on parent advocacy in special education has indicated that parents may increase their advocacy because of a negative experience or difficulties with the school (Burke & Hodapp, 2016), however it seems likely that families that advocate for the inclusion of their children are more likely to find their children placed in inclusive settings.

Parents have indicated that school and teacher-level factors are of vital importance in the successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Falkmer, et al., 2015). When surveyed, parents indicated that teachers were both facilitators and barriers to effective inclusion, citing student knowledge and communication as influencing the success of their students' inclusive experiences (Falkmer, et al., 2015). Additionally, schools must have a positive attitude towards inclusion and help build capacity in their teachers so that they can be more successful in inclusive classrooms (Falkmer, et al., 2015).

Through focus group interviews, research has shown that parents believe that the most important factors that promote inclusion are the school culture of inclusion focusing on welcoming all students and staff, school leaders and administrators that exhibit positive perceptions and actions towards all students, and positive partnerships that include communication, respect, commitment, and professional competence (Francis, et al., 2016). Other important factors contributing to the success of inclusive education include family engagement and involvement opportunities as well as positive outcomes for all students, both students with and without disabilities (Francis, et al., 2016).

Students

While there is little research around students and how they help to make inclusion successful, their motivation or satisfaction with the classroom setting may have some influence on their educational experience. It is important to note that a significant gap exists in research focusing on student opinions about their inclusive experiences, as there is limited research focusing on this topic. In a study focusing on acknowledging the voices of all students in their education, results found that both students with and without disabilities shared a sense of belonging in inclusive schools (Shogren, et al., 2015). Students felt that school staff had high expectations, high levels of support, and connections with teachers and peers in effective inclusive schools (Shogren, et al., 2015). An inclusive school culture was also cited as being important, and students discussed the school's focus on educating everyone together while students with disabilities also emphasized a preference for being educated with their peers. The last theme discussed by all students was the level of support at the school (Shogren, et al., 2015). Effective schools used a multi-tiered system of support across the school, utilized classroom level supports such as a "marble jar," and individual student supports to encourage positive student behavior. Academic supports were also used including co-teaching, diverse instructional practices, opportunities for students to engage in self-determination, and frequent feedback and re-teaching. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were also used. Teachers used multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to allow all students to access content (Shogren, et al., 2015).

Human Resources and Support

Paraprofessionals who are able to implement evidence-based practices with fidelity when provided with feedback can be a vital part of student success (Brock, et al., 2017). When the school provides qualified staff members who are competent and able to facilitate evidence-based practices effectively, student achievement may increase (Brock, et al., 2017). Paraprofessionals require more than just one or two training sessions to develop competence as well as ongoing monitoring and supervision, along with instructional direction from teachers (Giangreco & Hoza, 2013). Paraprofessionals who are qualified and competent at their jobs may be able to help foster the success of students in inclusive classroom settings by providing human resources and support grounded in the needs of the student.

Physical Factors

Based on student and teacher accounts, it is clear that the physical spaces of the classroom and school may hinder the ability of students to access their school community (Stanton- Chaman & Schmidt, 2016; Pivik, et al., 2002). Physical access can include materials and resources, such as the playground areas discussed by Stanton- Chaman and Schmidt (2016) as well as the physical building setup (Stephens, et al., 2015) as well as funding to support the creation of those areas. Schools that create a physical environment that promotes access for all students, regardless of disability, seem likely to help promote inclusive practices and inclusion itself.

Pedagogy

Training

Teacher and staff training is of vital importance in helping to build competence in providing an inclusive education. Paraprofessionals require and can benefit from training

that helps them to implement evidence-based practices (Brock, et al., 2017). Similarly, teachers require training and professional development that helps them to understand the background information on disabilities and explain teacher responsibilities, focus on strategies and instructional practices as well as behavior management, and technology (Goldstein, et al., 2013). When teachers and school staff have training and professional development opportunities, they are able to provide better instruction and meaningful interactions for their students.

Curriculum

Curriculum has been cited as a barrier to including students in the general education classroom because teachers often do not know what or how to teach (Peterson, 2016; Baaken, 2010; Halle & Dymond, 2008). Curriculum likely plays a role in the successful inclusion of students with complex support needs when the curriculum is modified and adapted to meet the needs of the student, and when it is appropriate for the developmental level of the student.

Methods and Strategies

Many methods and strategies have been posited as assisting in the implementation of inclusion. These may include peer support systems (Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Carter, et al., 2015; Copeland & Coseby, 2010; Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Spooner, Dymond, Smith, & Kennedy, 2006), co-teaching (Sweigart & Landr 2015), story-based instruction (Browder, et al., 2012), response cards (Clarke, et al., 2016, Randolph, 2007), curriculum modifications and accommodations (Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007), embedded instruction trials with constant time delay (Hudson, et al., 2013), visual supports (Cohen

& Demchak, 2018; Dettmer et al., 2000; Jaime & Knowlten, 2007), and school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS; Kurth & Enyart, 2016).

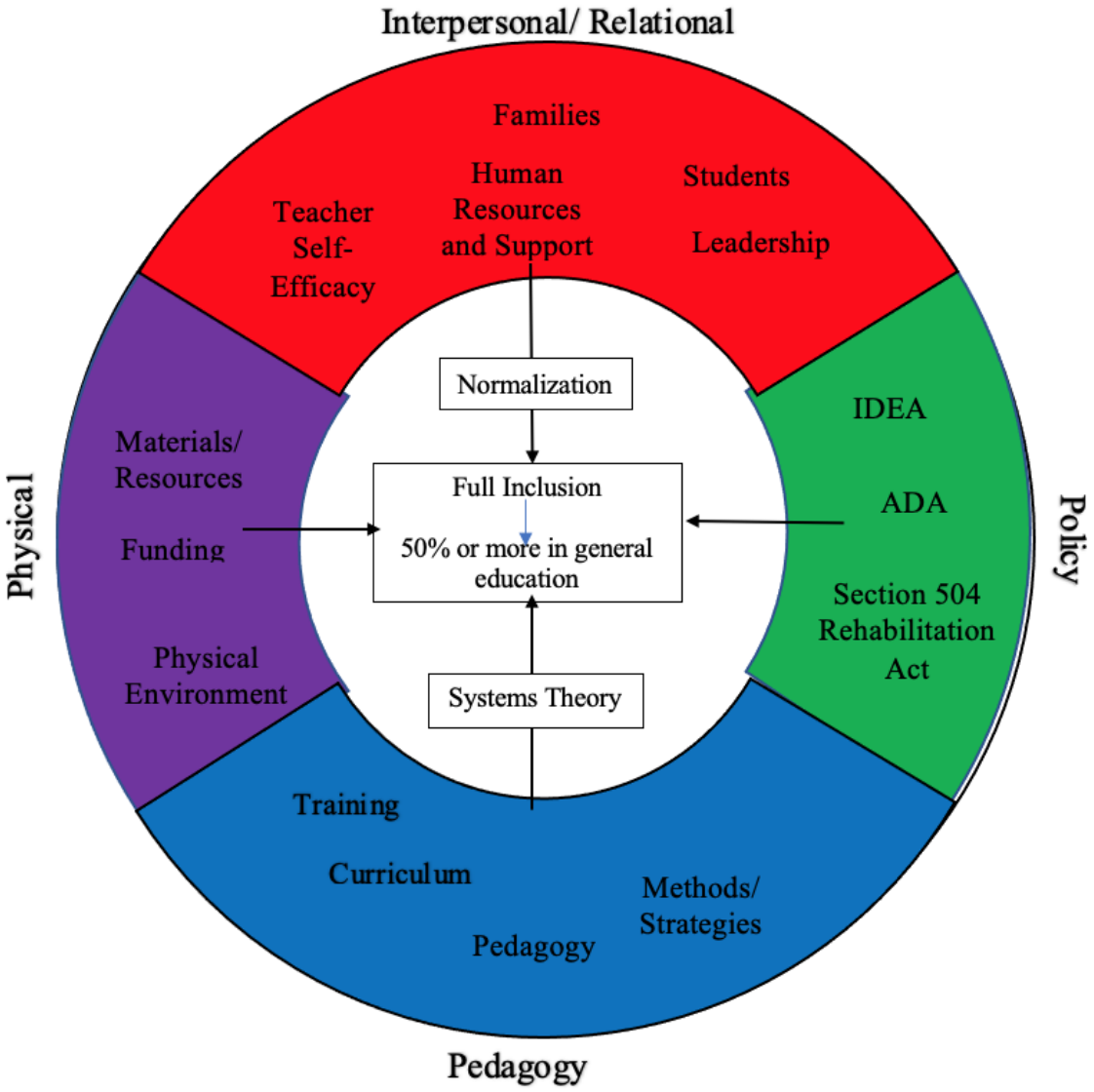
Teachers and school staff who are able to use some or all of these strategies, including some components of each, may be able to better create an inclusive environment that allows all students to learn.

Pedagogical Decisions

Teachers make pedagogical decisions about the structure and organization of their classrooms, interactions with students, activities, resources, and student engagement (Lawson, 2018). These decisions can impact all aspects of a student's educational experience, including placement and type of instruction. Teachers who make pedagogical decisions that consider providing students with access seem to be promoters of inclusion and may contribute to the successes of inclusion.

Figure 1

Inclusive Education Conceptual Framework



Implications for this Study

This conceptual framework that emerged from a review of the literature provides an understanding of the many variables and mechanisms at play that likely influence the inclusion of students with complex support needs. For the purposes of this study, only factors involving the school system or school personnel were explored, as families and

students were not participants. The implications of unveiling such information can help to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework that attempts to define the mechanisms used to include students with complex support needs in the general education classroom with their peers.

Summary

While there have been many policies enacted to encourage access for individuals with disabilities and there are documented benefits of inclusive practices, students with significant disabilities continue to be included with their peers at a lower rate than students with high incidence disabilities. Due to the research encouraging and discussing the benefits of inclusion, it is important that research be conducted to try and explore the mechanisms at play in including students with severe disabilities.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Based on the literature review presented in Chapter Two, there is evidence that gaps are present in the literature on inclusion and inclusive practices for students with complex support needs. Due to the unique characteristics of each student with a disability and the breadth of previous research that has a primary focus on whether or not inclusion is beneficial for students with and without disabilities, it is imperative that methods for inclusion as well as how teachers understand inclusion be evaluated. As mentioned, existing literature focuses more on the outcomes of inclusion for both disabled and non-disabled students (Kluth, 2019; Jorgensen, 2017; Carter, et al., 2008;

Cole, et al., 2004; Cosier, et al., 2013; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992; Jackson, et al., 2010; Sermier Dessemontet, et al., 2012).

The purpose of this study was to describe the resources and methods that teachers and school personnel used to include their students with complex support needs in the general education classroom. This study was limited to a data set that focuses on understanding how to support students with complex support needs in the inclusive environment.

There is a robust research base that documents and describes how inclusive education practices have been shown to be valuable for all students with disabilities regardless of the severity or impact of the disability, diagnosis, and demographic characteristics (Kluth, 2019; Jorgensen, 2017). Segregated environments, by comparison, have no research documenting their effectiveness over an inclusive classroom environment (Kluth, 2019; Favley, et al., 2000). Overall research has shown that students with disabilities make as much or more progress in the general education classroom when compared to students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms (Cosier, et al., 2013; Cole, et al., 2004).

Some studies focus on specific barriers and facilitators of inclusion (Morningstar, et al., 2015; McClesky, et al., 2012; Baaken, 2010; Yildiz, 2015; Halle & Dymond, 2008; Nilsen, 2017; Olson, et al., 2016; Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007; Zagona, Kurth, & Macfarland, 2017; Allday, et al., 2013; Goldstein, et al., 2013) but there are few studies with a focus on the mechanisms and resources, or how school personnel work to include students with disabilities. Inclusion can be facilitated at the school level when schools can provide supports for student participation through staffing, grouping, peer-supports,

and core academics (Morningstar, et al., 2015). They can also ensure the use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), behavior interventions, and accommodations/ modifications to encourage learning for all students (Morningstar, et al., 2015).

When students and families were asked about barriers to inclusion, they cited environmental issues including physical barriers such as stairs and other inaccessible features that were too small or too high (Pivik, et al., 2002). Students reported other barriers to access entry to schools including a lack of automatic doors, stairs to enter certain areas, narrow hallways, and broken elevators. Many participants also indicated that access to toileting was difficult, as well as general access to the classroom. Barriers to access made it difficult for students to access the physical environment as well as the social environment that comes with attending school with one's peers (Stephens, et al., 2015).

Concerns about students disrupting other members of the class and making it difficult for other students to learn have been cited as barriers to inclusion (Baaken, 2010). Students with disabilities may show off-task behavior or other problem behaviors throughout the school day (Yildiz, 2015). Additionally, teachers in self-contained classrooms demonstrate confusion around the logistics of curricular access including how to teach their students and the pace of instruction (Peterson, 2016). Teachers may also believe that students are too low academically and assign them work that has been significantly altered, or have concerns about how students will participate in high-stakes testing (Baaken, 2010; Halle & Dymond, 2008). Additionally, there is a lack of coordination between general education and special education teachers (Nilsen, 2017).

Staff in an inclusive school need to be committed to giving students access and engage in shared responsibility among special education and general education teachers (Olson, et al., 2016).

Principal leadership is also profoundly important in the implementation of inclusive practices, with some school stakeholders feeling that the principal is the key to success because he is able to develop and maintain an organizational structure that supports inclusion (Shogren, et al., 2015). When considering teachers, they must be provided with professional development opportunities and teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers to work in inclusive classroom settings and with students who have disabilities (Zagona, et al., 2017; Allday, et al., 2013; Goldstein, et al., 2013).

Due to the limited research focusing on how students with complex support needs are included in the general education setting, data analysis within this study focused on understanding how participants successfully included students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting as distinct from research that focuses on whether or not inclusion benefits students with complex support needs. In sum, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the process for including students with complex support needs. Through the completion of a basic interpretive design study, which emphasizes the importance of viewing the world from the perspective of the participant. (Merriam, 2009), the mechanisms used to promote inclusion will be a key focus on this study. In addition, Merriam (2009) emphasizes the importance of viewing the world from the perspective of the participant. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom?
2. What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to the successful inclusion of students with complex support needs?
3. How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?

Methods and Procedures

Methodological Approach

This dissertation is based in an epistemological orientation that aligns closely with social constructivism, which posits that "reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences" (Creswell, 2003, p.36). Social constructivism is characterized by a desire to develop a deeper understanding of the world and the phenomenon or topic that is being investigated (Creswell, 2003).

Social constructivist theory includes numerous theories that can be practiced in an inclusive classroom including the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, and modeling (Sanders & Welk, 2005). The research question is grounded in social constructivism, focusing on the broad means that school personnel use to promote inclusion and inclusive practices. This allows the participants to construct the meaning of the encounters and their experiences, which can then be observed and documented by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of the research is to describe, interpret, and understand the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research questions were best explored using a qualitative approach, which provided the researcher with opportunities to explore how or why an anomaly occurs in a situation with variables that are difficult to control or with more than one stakeholder opinion (Trainor & Graue, 2014). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a qualitative design focuses on developing an understanding of how people experience and make sense of their lives and experiences. Using this focus, qualitative design typically includes the consideration of a research problem, the development of research questions, data collection and analysis, and reporting the results (Creswell, 2013). There are multiple types of qualitative research including an ethnographical study focusing on the culture of a group, a phenomenological study addressing the experience, grounded theory that aims to use data grounded in the field to develop a theory, and the case study that focuses on describing and analyzing a bounded case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For this study, it was most appropriate to use a basic interpretive design, which is a study whose purpose is to understand how people experience and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Utilizing basic interpretive design allows the researcher to investigate and describe a certain phenomenon and describe their results using a "thick description" to contribute information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The sample size was comprised of multiple school staff members working in inclusive settings. This design was chosen because of the limited research available around the mechanisms of inclusion and the need for an in-depth description of how inclusion is occurring in different school districts.

The social constructivist epistemology also lends itself to basic interpretive design, as it approaches research with an inductive method of research and often uses

data sources including interviews and observations (Creswell, 2012). Observing and taking data through a social constructivist lens recognizes that the meaning of the data is co-constructed by the researcher and the topic being researched, which can be described through a broad question meant to develop a deeper understanding of the topic (Creswell, 2012). This study utilizes such a broad research question to observe the means used by school personnel to promote inclusion with the intent of describing those different mechanisms.

Qualitative methods are appropriate for special education research because it helps with the controlled and intentional dissemination of the stories of people with disabilities (Pugach, Mukhopadhyay, & Gomez- Najarro, 2014). Due to the unique differences of each individual with a disability, qualitative research can be used to understand the unique perspectives of people with disabilities and their communities, as well as the society in which they participate (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Additionally, qualitative researchers consistently engage in safeguards to ensure rigor in their research (Pugach, et al., 2014; Brantlinger, et al., 2005). Some measures of ensuring credibility of research include tactics such as triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and a thick description (Brantlinger, et al., 2005).

When quality indicators including appropriately selecting the variables of the research, clear interview questions and accurate transcriptions, and taking systematic notes are employed, qualitative research can be seen as more robust and rigorous (Brantlinger, et al., 2005). Qualitative research in special education can be used to document a detailed exploration of a specific condition or individual's experience, which

can help to further the knowledge and understanding of the field of special education (Brantlinger, et al., 2005). Additionally, qualitative research can be rigorous and robust when researchers recognize and disclose the role of theory in their research and design, maintain transparency across the study design and data analysis, and clearly articulate positionality and reflexivity (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Sampling Procedure and Description

The participants for this study were general education and special education teachers who work with students with disabilities who are included in the public school general education classroom for at least 50% of the school day in the United States. To be considered for this study, participants were required to have worked in some capacity with a student with complex disabilities who is included in the general education classroom. Teachers were required to have interactions with the included students and participate in their instruction. The sample for this study included teachers from multiple schools and school districts across the United States in grades Kindergarten to twelfth grade.

When data collection occurred, all participants were required to have been working in the school district for the entire duration of one school year.

Sampling Procedure

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants in this study. Purposeful sampling finds its foundation in the idea that the researcher must find a sample that allows the most to be learned in order to develop a deep understanding of the concepts and ideas that he wants to study (Merriam, 2016). It is important to engage in purposeful sampling in this study in order to develop a rich understanding of the strategies and

resources used to include students in the general education curriculum. The selected sample needed to be rich with information and provide the researcher with opportunities to learn about the ideas and concepts central to the research (Patton, 1990). The specific type of purposeful sampling that was used is snowball sampling (Merriam, 2016). Snowball sampling, also called network sampling, allows the researcher to ask participants to identify other participants who may have rich information related to the research (Merriam, 2016). Snowball sampling is typically used when certain groups are participants are difficult to locate or may be rare (Crosman, 2015). For this study, key members in the areas of special education and inclusive practices were asked to identify other participants who may have inclusion experiences. All participants were invited to participate in the study via an email invitation (See Appendix A).

Sample Description

The sample included sixteen teachers from across the United States. The majority of participants were located in the state of Virginia, with others located in California. All of the participants worked with students with complex support needs who participated in the general education curriculum in the general education classroom setting for at least 50% of the school day. Of the participants, fifteen were female and one was male. There were four general education teachers and twelve special education teachers. Each teacher was asked to describe the grade level that they currently teach and their experience in education. The grade levels taught varied, as did the years of experience, with ten teachers indicating that they taught secondary grade levels, five teachers indicating that they taught elementary grade levels, and one teacher who taught both

elementary and secondary grades. The years of experience ranged between 3-25 or more years.

Data Collection

In order to complete this study, interviews and an optional review of lesson plans were completed. First, each of the general education teachers and special education teachers who were implementing the inclusion process for a student with complex support needs was asked to participate in an interview intended to gather qualitative data on the mechanisms and resources used to include the student.

Semi- Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted, and helped to develop a detailed understanding of participant perspectives regarding the means used to include students with complex support needs. These in-depth interviews were imperative in helping the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the experience of participants as well as provide important insight into the perspectives of important stakeholders in inclusive education (Seidman, 2006). They could also assist in discovering how teachers perceive the inclusion in their school or classroom. Each interview was semi-structured, and some were prolonged due to the depth of information that may be revealed (Merriam, 2016). Semi- structured interviews provide a variety of both structured and unstructured questions and are grounded in the idea that each individual perceives and defines their experiences in their own unique ways (Merriam, 2016). Allowing the participants to answer open-ended questions helped provide them with opportunities to recreate their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Interview data collection was appropriate because it

allowed the researcher to explore the perspectives of participants in detail and in an open-ended manner that provided participants with opportunities to share their thoughts.

According to Seidman (2006), it is vital that a consistent interview structure be developed that allows participants to both recreate and reflect on their experiences and can be replicated and documented. The researcher met with each participant over Skype or a similar platform for approximately one-hour to conduct a semi-structured interview. Skype and similar platforms allow researchers to occur in convenient locations and at convenient times for the researcher and the participant (Janghorban, et al. 2014). Additionally, according to Hanna (2012), the use of Skype interviews can be justified in the same manner that telephone interviews were justified by Holt (2010). This is because Skype interviews expand the interview to include a visual component that may preserve the face-to-face experience (Hanna, 2012; Deakin & Wakefield, 2013).

The researcher contacted participants via phone or email to schedule the interview and make arrangements that met the needs of participants. An informed consent form was provided to each participant. Each interview was recorded with participant permission, which was given by all sixteen participants. There were no participants who did not wish to be recorded, however the researcher planned to have their interviews documented by detailed notes if any participant did not provide consent. The use of a recording device was important because it allowed the researcher to have an authentic record of the interview and confirm the things that were said while preserving the interview (Merriam, 2016; Seidman, 2006).

Development of Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was developed to help guide each interview and conversation, and it was piloted one time to test the questions and give familiarity. This helped to ensure consistency across participants. The interview questions followed Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin's (1981) four categories of interview questions and included a mix of hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, ideal position questions, and interpretive questions. While the interview guide provided a general scaffold for each interview, probing was used to gain more information, clarify comments made by participants, and provide examples (Merriam, 2016). Each interview question was aligned with the research questions guiding this study (See Figure 2 below). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 2

Research Questions and Interview Question Alignment

Research Question	**Interview Question**
Demographic Questions	**What is your current position?** **Can you tell me about your experience(s) working in the school setting?** **What age groups do you work with or have you worked with?** **Which special education settings have you worked in? Has the setting been primarily general education or self-contained?**

How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom?	**Can you share a time when you saw successful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?** **Can you talk about some things that you think help you to successfully include students? Are there specific resources or strategies that you think were helpful?** **Can you share a time when you saw unsuccessful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?** **Can you describe any specific evidence-based practices to promote inclusion?** **Can you share about a time when you taught grade-level content to a student with complex support needs?** **Can you describe a time when you saw students with complex support needs interacting with or engaging with peers?**
What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to successful inclusion of students with complex support needs?	**What training have you had around inclusion or inclusive practices? Where did you receive the training?** **When you were told that you would be working in an inclusive setting, what preparation was required for you to receive the student(s)?** **What is the role of the school administrator in inclusion?** **Can you talk about some things that you think create barriers to inclusion and inclusive practices?** **What do you feel is the greatest facilitator for inclusion in the school?**

How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?	**Can you talk about how you measure whether inclusion is working and how you engage in ongoing evaluation and reflection of the program?** **Can you share a time when you saw successful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?** **Can you share a time when you saw unsuccessful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?**

Document Review

An optional document review was conducted in order to gather more information on the planning process for students who are included. A review of teacher lesson plans could be used to help provide more information, verify hypotheses, and help build theories (Merriam, 2016). Teachers were asked to voluntarily provide lesson plans, which would help to provide insight into the planning process for teachers and school staff as well as the allocation of staff and the use of practices and strategies that promote inclusion. One teacher opted to provide lesson materials for the document review (See Appendix F), however all other participants elected not to provide lesson plans or materials used with their students for this study.

Data Management

Data was collected using semi-structured qualitative interviews. Interview data was recorded and transcribed, as well as provided to participants for a member check review. A professional transcription service was used. Once interview data was transcribed, it was reviewed and checked for accuracy by the researcher. The

transcription was compared to the audio file for accuracy, and it was stored in a confidential word processor file with a password for protection. The data was transferred to a qualitative research software for coding and analysis. Names of participants were translated into numbers in order to maintain confidentiality. These notes and materials were kept in a locked cabinet with only the researcher having access.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through a process called coding. A code is defined by Saldana (2016) as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.4). The coding process took place in two steps: open coding and axial coding. Open coding, also called initial coding, allows the researcher to break down the data into small parts and closely examine the parts, looking for similarities (Saldana, 2016, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These similarities can be used to note patterns and themes that are related to the research questions of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the open coding process, in vivo coding was utilized to ensure that the voices of participants are honored and recognized (Saldana, 2016).

After the initial coding was complete, axial coding was used as a second step. Axial coding required a review of the initial codes and an analysis that determines whether or not there are links between the codes. Axial coding also helps to make determinations about the most dominant codes and those that are less significant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Following the axial coding process, it is recommended that the data be re-categorized and the codes be combined into larger ideas that can lead to important themes

(Roulston, 2014). Important themes were explored by noting repetitions or recurrences of concepts, missing data, and theory-related materials (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Other notable elements of the data that were documented include indigenous or local words, metaphors or analogies, transitions, and linguistic connectors (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). These recommendations were utilized as a guideline in determining important themes, however other themes were explored as they occur. As recommended by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), codes were developed to represent patterns and concepts.

The final step in the data analysis process, according to Roulston (2014) was writing up and interpreting the research findings. These are presented in Chapter 4 through the emerging themes as they relate to the research questions and conceptual framework.

Considerations

Reflexivity

According to Creswell (2013), it is important for researchers to disclose their backgrounds and experiences as it relates to the research being conducted. This allows readers to develop an understanding of the positionality of the researcher and understand any biases that may have had an impact on the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, researchers develop and implement their studies based on their own experiences and identities (Trainor & Graue, 2014). The experiences and understandings of a researcher help to inform the lens through which they understand the problem and interpret results (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

For this dissertation, the researcher recognized her previous experiences and understandings in understanding the research problem, study design, and data

interpretation. As a special education teacher for six years, the researcher had many experiences teaching students with complex support needs across settings. These settings included both self-contained and inclusive settings, in a variety of school districts. She also worked with teachers as an inclusion coach to help teachers create an inclusive school setting and engaged in observations of both teachers and students, providing written feedback to school personnel.

These experiences could have been similar to those of the participants in this study, and the researcher was aware that it is vital to maintain continued separation of participants' opinions and her own. In order to maintain continued separation of participants' reflections and her own, the researcher utilized analytic memos. Analytic memos can be used to understand how the researcher relates to the phenomenon or topic at hand and serve as a reflection on anything related to the research including ethical dilemmas in the study as well as other thoughts or concerns (Saldana, 2016).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In order to establish trustworthiness in this study, guidance from Lincoln and Guba (1986) was used. The authors argue that trustworthiness is established when a study has credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Credibility involves a level of trust in the truth of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), and was established in this study through the use of prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement involves spending substantive time engaging with the setting, people, and environment of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In order to establish trustworthiness in this study, guidance from Lincoln and Guba (1986) was used. The

authors argue that trustworthiness is established when a study has credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Credibility involves a level of trust in the truth of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), and was established in this study through the use of prolonged engagement and member checks. Prolonged engagement involves spending substantive time engaging with the setting, people, and environment of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss member checks and describe them as an opportunity to allow participants to look over tentative findings to determine if they are realistic. Member checks can confirm the things that were said during interviews. This is done by transcribing the interview and then providing it to the participant to review and edit if there is anything taken out of context after the data is collected. Member checks were completed after data collection and transcription, and before data analysis began. All transcripts were sent to participants electronically for review, and participants were asked to verify their transcripts or indicate the inaccuracies. Transferability is defined as the ability to apply the findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Through a thick description, the researcher can provide information and detailed data so that others can make decisions about the ability of the data to be applied to other settings and situations (Creswell, 2013). The recommendations from Creswell (2013) were used in the data collection and analysis process, which includes the use of quotations, verbs, related details, and describing broad and specific ideas throughout the data analysis process. In addition to the use of a thick description, the use of purposeful sampling will also help to support transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Dependability is defined as having consistent and replicable ideas, and confirmability is defined as the neutrality of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Both dependability and confirmability were established through the use of the dissertation committee, which completed an external audit of the research. An external audit involves the use of a researcher who is not involved in the research process reviewing and evaluating the accuracy of the study and its process (Miller, 1997).

Ethics

The George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this proposal and ensured that all strategies to protect participants are utilized. There was little risk to individuals who participate in this study, with multiple efforts to maintain confidentiality. All identifying information was removed from data to ensure that individuals are protected, and pseudonyms were used in any transcripts that use names. Additionally, any descriptors and background information that may reveal the identity of an individual was avoided throughout the research process. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent that provides details about the research as well as any potential risks and includes contact information for where to direct questions. Participants will also be notified that their participation in this study is voluntary.

Summary

This chapter describes the research methods that were used to attempt to answer the research questions described in the following section. A basic interpretive design was used, with interviews and lesson plan reviews as the sources of data. After data collection, interview transcriptions and other data was coded using open and axial coding.

The data management protocol is described, as well as information on trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the current resources, strategies, and methods used by personnel involved in the effective inclusion of students with complex support needs in the general education classroom working in classrooms that are reported to currently implement effective inclusive education practices. Participants were recruited and confirmed that they had been working for at least one year with a student with complex support needs who was included in the general education classroom setting for at least 50% of the school day. Using a qualitative approach, this research aimed to develop a better understanding of how students with complex support needs are included in the general education classroom, as well as the facilitators and barriers to their successful inclusion.

To discover this, each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed using the software Dedoose. Emerging themes were determined based on the coded data and were organized according to the following research questions:

1. How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom?

2. What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to successful inclusion of students with complex support needs?
3. How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?

This chapter will describe the sample of teachers, the interview process, and emerging themes in more detail.

Description of the Sample

The sample of sixteen teachers included four general education teachers and twelve special education teachers from across the United States. The majority of participants were located in the state of Virginia, with others located in California. All of the participants worked with students with complex support needs who participated in the general education curriculum in the general education classroom setting for at least 50% of the school day. Of the participants, fifteen were female and one was male.

Each teacher was asked to describe the grade level that they currently teach and their experience in education. The grade levels taught varied, as did the years of experience. The years of experience ranged between 3-25 or more years. The teaching demographics of each participant are provided below in Table 2.

Table 2

Teaching Demographics, by Participant, Teaching Designation, and Grade Level

Participant	Teacher Designation	Grade Level	Number of years teaching
Participant 1	General Education	Secondary	20+
Participant 2	General Education	Secondary	1-5

Participant 3	Special Education	Elementary	20+
Participant 4	Special Education	Secondary	16-20
Participant 5	Special Education	Secondary	11-15
Participant 6	Special Education	Secondary	6-10
Participant 7	Special Education	Elementary and Secondary	16-20
Participant 8	Special Education	Secondary	16-20
Participant 9	Special Education	Elementary	6-10
Participant 10	General Education	Secondary	16-20
Participant 11	Special Education	Secondary	1-5
Participant 12	General Education	Secondary	6-10
Participant 13	Special Education	Secondary	1-5
Participant 14	Special Education	Elementary	1-5
Participant 15	Special Education	Elementary	6-10
Participant 16	Special Education	Elementary	6-10

At the start of the interview, participants were asked to describe the training they had received around inclusive practices as well as whether or not it was provided through a university or the school or district. The majority of participants (twelve) cited their university program as the primary source of training on inclusive education, and all participants who discussed learning about inclusive education in their university programs described learning about them through behavior or introduction to disability courses. There were two participants who described having no formal training through their university or school district programs. There were thirteen participants who

described receiving training through the school district, but all participants described the training as being short and in limited scope.

Table 3

Participant Training Data

Participant	Primary Training	Secondary Training
Participant 1	No formal training	
Participant 2	University provided	School District provided
Participant 3	School District provided	
Participant 4	University provided	School District provided
Participant 5	University provided	School District provided
Participant 6	University provided	School District provided
Participant 7	University provided	School District provided
Participant 8	University provided	School District provided
Participant 9	University provided	School District provided
Participant 10	No formal training	
Participant 11	University provided	School District provided
Participant 12	University provided	
Participant 13	School District provided	
Participant 14	University provided	School District provided
Participant 15	University provided	School District provided
Participant 16	University provided	School District provided

Description of Process and Analysis of Participant Interviews

Each individual interview was conducted online via a recorded video chat at a mutually agreeable time for the researcher and the participant. The participant was asked

to be in a private setting free of any noise or other people. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) guided the interview process with each participant. Interviews ranged from 19 to 65 minutes in length. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher allowed participants to share any additional thoughts or comments regarding inclusive education or the interview and explained that she would provide participants with a copy of their transcript to review it for accuracy before moving to the analysis process. All sixteen participants agreed and were sent their transcripts to review; fourteen of the participants responded and indicated that the transcription was accurate, and the two remaining participants did not respond. Participation in a member check was not a requirement for study participation, so all non-responses were interpreted as agreement with the accuracy of the transcript from the participant.

All collected data from the interviews and researcher memos were first analyzed using open coding in Dedoose. Open coding of all sixteen interviews resulted in over 500 codes during the initial coding round. During the second and third round of axial coding, codes were merged, renamed, and sorted into four large code families: relational factors, pedagogical factors, physical factors, and actions to promote inclusion. Themes that emerged from these code families were broken down in accordance with the language of the research questions. In the following sections, the emerging themes and its sub themes will be discussed in detail. Each theme is named with words that best summarizes the study participants' collective data, and direct quotations are used to accurately represent what participants said.

Discussion of Emerging Themes

Participant responses to research questions often seemed to be interconnected among participants, with special education and general education teachers providing similar responses, especially when discussing facilitators and barriers. However, special education teachers often discussed their barriers and facilitators in more detail, adding information specific and relevant to their experience as special education teachers.

In addition, when participants discussed factors relating to inclusive education, if the presence of something was seen as a factor that helped to facilitate inclusion, the absence of it was seen as something that impeded the success of inclusion for their students. For example, common planning time for collaboration was cited as a factor that helped to support a successful inclusive education experience. A lack of common planning time was discussed as a factor that made it difficult for teachers to create an effective inclusive education experience.

Results were organized around the research questions due to the significant overlap in responses between both general education and special education teachers, strategies used to promote inclusive education, participant monitoring strategies for inclusive education, and facilitators and barriers to inclusive education (See Figure 3). Based on participant responses, themes were grouped around two types of research questions: responses around providing access to content and monitoring the inclusive program and responses around facilitators and barriers. Themes in each of these groups were clustered to categorize participant experiences of inclusive education for their students with complex support needs. In this study, there were three emerging themes and nine subthemes. Each of the subthemes were organized by relevant topics and subtopics discussed by participants.

Figure 3

Relevant Emerging Themes and Subthemes

Theme	**Subthemes**
Teachers need strategies to teach students with complex support needs in the general education setting	Subtheme: Classroom Strategies Topics: Co-teaching UDL Frequent Breaks and Movement Peer Buddies Physical Classroom Tools Visual Aids Understanding Behavior and Interventions Used The Need for Training Subtheme: Content Strategies Topics: Differentiation, Scaffolding, Modifying content Explicit instruction. Memory aids/ Repetition/ Spiral Review. Preteaching Small group instruction Technology
Planning and Monitoring for Program outcomes	Subthemes: Understanding Students and Observing Student Growth Following and Monitoring IEP's Changes in Social Engagement Transition Planning
Factors that influence the success of inclusion for students with complex support needs.	Subtheme: Relational factors: Topics and Subtopics: General Communication People Staff Attitudes Administrators Support

	Mission and Vision Scheduling Training Paraprofessionals Parents Students Subtheme: Pedagogical factors Topics: Training Scheduling Curriculum Classroom Management Specific Programs Subtheme: Physical factors Topics: Physical Environment Funding and Resources

Findings to Research Questions 1 and 3

In this section, findings related to research questions 1 and 3 will be discussed. Research question 1 is: How do school staff provide students with complex support needs access to curricular content and provide opportunities for relationship development with peers in the general education classroom? Research question 3 is: How do school staff make meaning of including students with complex support needs in their general education classrooms?

These two questions are discussed together because the researcher found that the ways that school staff members provided access to the inclusive education environment were related to how they made meaning of their work including students. When participants described instances of successful inclusion or times when they taught grade

level content, they often mentioned specific strategies that they used to support the student, which helped them to make meaning of inclusive education.

Overall, multiple themes emerged, with some smaller subthemes. The first theme that evolved from the interviews was focused on the finding that teachers need strategies to provide access to the general education curriculum for their students with complex support needs. Teachers discussed a variety of things that they do or things that they use to make inclusion successful for their students. Without the use of these strategies, which were sometimes used for the whole class or on an individual basis, students could not successfully access their education. Within this theme of teachers needing strategies to ensure their student's access to their education, several subthemes were discovered. These included subthemes around the need for content strategies and general classroom strategies, as outlined in Figure 3. A separate theme emerged relating to question 3, which focused on planning for program outcomes as a finding related to the way participants make meaning of including students with complex support needs in the general education setting. Another theme emerged around program monitoring and largely consisted of the things that teachers do or use to monitor whether or not the inclusion program is working.

Teacher Need Strategies for Inclusion

Classroom Strategies. Classroom strategies emerged as a subtheme within the theme of teachers needing strategies to teach students with complex support needs. Classroom strategies were strategies that teachers used within their classroom across the school day and across settings to support their students. These strategies were used to support the entirety of the class, including both students with disabilities and students

without. Classroom strategies were described as important strategies in facilitating a successful inclusive education experience. The emergent topics within this subtheme included co-teaching, UDL, frequent breaks and movement, peer buddies, physical classroom tools, visual aids, understanding behavior, and having the training needed to facilitate inclusion.

Co-teaching. Participants discussed co-teaching as an important strategy that was used with all of their students and helped to support their growth and learning. Nearly 70% of participants in this study, or eleven of the sixteen teachers, indicated that they worked in a co-taught classroom setting. Five of the teachers indicated that they worked in a general education setting with special education students but they were part of a push-in model.

Teachers described co-teaching as a strategy that was useful in providing instruction to their students and helping them to access their learning.

Participant 15 (Special Education Teacher) described her co-teaching experience below using alternate teaching:

> So, I began the classroom and I instructed the, I was very explicit and I taught the kids the examples with them of the box method, which is called partial product for doing long multiplication. And then we just kind of switched gears and literally had the kids turn their desks around in two different parts of the classroom. And I just took my whiteboard and worked more specifically with my students and then she worked and taught a different method with the other students. So I have to admit that it was definitely a timeframe where it was wonderful ‘cause we got to incorporate so many things into one class period and it was definitely inclusive. And, it was nice for my kids to see me playing a role and using a strategy and teaching it to the whole group and then getting deeper down with just them.

Similar to Participant 15, Participant 7 (Special Education Teacher) described using alternate teaching as a co-teaching method when teaching reading:

> So the entire class is doing one novel. And then we were able to purchase some modified materials so that our students with more intensive needs were able to access the same story but on their level. But the teachers really are co-teaching the concepts and the tasks simultaneously, even though they're using two different texts.

Participant 2 (General Education Teacher) discussed co-teaching as a benefit and discussed his use of station teaching and the benefits to have someone available at each station.

> ...That allowed the maximum availability of instructors to be able to spend time with students. And it also gave us a sequential way for students to work their way through the activity and being able to monitor them as they go so that we can kind of spot treat. Some of the difficulties that might've have come up with the students completing the assignment. And if also, like I said, it broke the students into smaller groups. So they were a little bit more manageable. Basically. They were they had to go around and look up different, there was different almost like dossiers on different careers and they would have to read about those careers and take down certain information and do a reflection activity. And so there was never really a time where we broke it up into stations where the students were sitting there spinning their wheels. They always had someone to put things in context or read to them identified difficult vocab terms, things like that.

Universal Design for Learning. Within the co-teaching environment, the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) were utilized and demonstrated with technology to provide students with an education in an inclusive setting. Through allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge by multiple means of representation with technology, some students were able to show that they understood the content. Participant 5 (Special Education) discussed her use of UDL:

> [The students] were asked to, illustrate, a setting, from a story in their mind. He couldn't draw, didn't want to draw whatever his excuses were. He was refusing to draw. So I said, “Okay, you don't have to physically draw anything, but can you do, technology part of a PowerPoint?”
> I said, “Can you do a PowerPoint presentation and you can use clip art. You can go on and use any type of, of, of, of, cutting and pasting from articles or pictures that make that you can feel, you can discuss what was happening in the story from something that is already designed.”

> And then to make a long story short, the child did a PowerPoint presentation and he used pictures that he found online to present and to explain how he felt the characters were acting in the story. So we did a, an accommodation piece that was normally, that's something we just normally don't even think of. A child is not wanting to sketch or draw, but he just particularly didn't care to sketch, didn't care to draw. So I said, "Okay, well Johnny, you don't have to draw, you don't have to sketch your feelings of what you think is going on in the story. Go ahead and find what you want online and can you do a PowerPoint presentation?"
> He was technically savvy and guess what? It turned out to be beautiful, but we accommodated him and met him at his comfort level and it was an awesome PowerPoint.

Frequent Breaks and Movement. Some participants described practices that were intended to support students in all aspects of their day and could be used multiple times throughout the day. Frequent breaks were mentioned by four participants as being vital in their practices with students with disabilities. The structure and events of the breaks varied based on participant experiences, but all participants described using frequent breaks as a way to give the student some time in a quiet place away from their peers and classroom. Breaks were also described as a way to encourage increased times of engagement in the inclusive setting by Participant 9 (Special Education):

> I had a kid that was very, very brilliant in math. He just loved numbers. It was the time when he thrived the most. So he would at first go to this first grade class that we're buddy classes with for five minutes at the very end of their math class, and then we would kind of backwards plan so that he would be there for seven minutes, the next week, and 10 minutes when he could handle it. And we would always give the kids the option of coming back to our own classroom. If it was too noisy or we had the lights off in our classroom a lot for less, input. And that's not how a lot of other classrooms do it. So if it was ever too bright, he could ask to come back to our classroom

For other students, breaks were a way to allow the student to calm down and provide an escape from the general education setting for short periods of time when it became too overwhelming. Participant 3 (Special Education) described using breaks with one of her students who had significant behavior difficulties:

> One kid I had, he was also self-injurious. He would hit the desk, he would pick at his skin 'til he bled. And we had worked and worked and worked and worked on self appropriate self-soothing behaviors, not picking at the skin and everything like that. So, one day he, was in the classroom and it was kinda rough. And he walked with me, I said, would you, and this is before I had all the sensory stuff in my brain and I've got the filtered lights, so it's not so bright and it's, it's a lot more soothing. And he just sat in there. I mean, I saw him hit his head on the desk, just punching the desk, pulling out his hair. Various things like that. And I just sat there beside him and I just started modeling a breathing technique when you go out your hand and you breathe in it down is out. And I was just doing that myself. And then he joined in. Oh, we didn't do breathing the whole time. And he talked about that it was the borrowing for subtraction, but set them off. So the teacher had a ton of hands-on stuff, so we used the base 10 blocks and we sat down on the floor and we made problems with base 10 blocks and showed how the borrowing model worked. And then once he saw that he was okay he was so proud of himself afterwards for being able to understand the math. But then he talked a lot about how he calmed himself down. He's like, "I can do this. I can do this." I'm like, "es you can. I've always known you could, I can do this. Yes, you can yes you can."

Movement was also commonly used by teachers across the school day both in teaching content and to help support their students with taking breaks from the content while still being a member of the classroom community. Participant 4 (Special Education) described her creative use of movement to teach academic concepts and engage students in their learning:

> So we arranged the desks into the X axis and the Y axis. And we numbered each desk one, two, three, negative one, negative two, negative three. And we gave students an index card that had the point on it and they had to look at, they had to find, they were the human points. They had to look at a desk two this way and desk four this way and then stand where those two would join up. And it really kinda gave them more of an idea instead of just, I'm putting dots on this piece of paper. And then some of them that were really low, we let some work in partnership. So one would find the X one, we find the Y and they'd walk towards each other. And that was really kind of fun.

One participant described her use of movement as a way to take a break but still continue learning. Participant 9 (Special Education) discussed her use of GoNoodle programs to engage her students and their peers and break up an activity. When using GoNoodle, she frequently relied on peer buddies or mentors to help support the

movement activity and encourage the students with disabilities to participate. She also discussed the strategic use of peer buddies to model activities for students:

> Getting a lot of the kiddos that are in my classroom to participate with hands on things is usually more of a challenge, but they're also a lot more inclined if it's not an adult telling them to do that. So I saw a lot more kids crossing over uncapping glue sticks for other kids and giving it to them, twisting the bottom if they had a lot more fine motor needs.

Peer buddies. There were two participants who specifically described the use of peer buddies in the classroom as a strategy for increasing student engagement in the inclusive education setting. Participant 16 (Special Education) described peer buddies as being a support for her student's success in general education, stating:

> We also worked really hard to build a support system within the classroom for the student. While he did have some academic needs, a lot of his needs were focused on behavior. So he had two buddies in the classroom who would sit next to him and help him out when he needed it. I think that was helpful… By the end of the school year, he was fully included for the entire school day with only the support that came from the co-teacher in the class. It was a really great success because this was a student who had been in a self-contained class for his entire life. And he really had the skills and the desire to be around his peers but he was never given the opportunity.

Participant 9 (Special Education) also utilized peer buddies within her classroom and described seeing increases in student engagement with the use of peer buddies, stating that "every single time [engagement] goes up and the last time we had it together saw a ton more of that- of kids just helping kids" and working together.

Physical Classroom Tools. In addition to using peer buddies as supports, multiple participants discussed using physical tools or objects to support their student's learning. These physical tools were useful in demonstrating concepts to students and providing them with access to concrete objects to enhance their understanding of concepts. Participants described physical tools as things that they created or

manipulatives specifically intended for math. Participant 4 (Special Education) described using Lego blocks to support the teaching of quadratic equations:

> I borrowed my grandsons, the big giant Legos and I had the quadratic equation on the bigger Lego and I had the two factors on the smaller Legos. And instead of saying factor this out, I gave him one quadratic with four factors and said, "Okay, which of these two is going to make this quadratic?" So instead of saying, "Okay, take each one of these and work it from scratch." It's okay. Let's only give you two or three options and work through it. And you know, how can we kind of do it backwards to see where we're at so we know how to do it forward. And that really worked 'cause it was a hands on. I started out with one equation with three factors. I didn't pick, find the two that match. And then we practiced that a little bit. And then a couple weeks later I added another factor. So I've got four factors. They have to take the two out of four, then I increase it to six.

Manipulatives were mentioned by other participants as vital in teaching math concepts, including for making patterns as well as for counting. Participant 3 (Special Education) described her use of base ten blocks to teach borrowing to a student with significant behaviors:

> So the teacher had a ton of hands-on stuff, so we used the base 10 blocks and we sat down on the floor and we made problems with base 10 blocks and showed that borrowing worked. And then once he saw that he was okay he was so proud of himself afterwards for being able to understand the math.

Participant 8 (Special Education) also described the use of manipulatives to teach math, but the manipulatives were real coins and bills used to count money in a real-life scenario of a school store, which allowed the student to learn and practice counting money.

Visual Aids. Visual aids were also described as an important strategy for supporting students with complex disabilities in their participation in the general education setting. For some participants, the visual aids included things such as schedules or cue cards, while other participants used the visual aids to support understanding of instruction. Participant 6 (Special Education) discussed using picture ID cards and other visuals to teach her students content in language arts, specifically

when teaching about *Romeo and Juliet* (See Appendix F). Similarly, Participant 14 (Special Education) discussed using visuals to help her students learn social studies content and as a memory aid for vocabulary:

> I would work with the teacher ahead of time, know what the most critical pieces of information were because in social studies, there's often a lot of extra stuff that may not be the core lesson. So we talked ahead of time and I'd know what the essential pieces would be. And then, I used visuals with the student to try and create that recognition. I would send the visuals home. We would use the same visuals if possible on the test once that came around, to try and trigger the student's memory.

Understanding Behavior and Management Strategies. Behavior is often cited as a barrier to meaningful inclusion. Many participants (thirteen) indicated that their students had significant interfering behaviors that could have impacted their success in the general education setting in addition to significant cognitive disabilities or physical needs.

Findings from this study indicated that teachers had to manage student behaviors in order to help support the successful implementation of inclusive education, however, they had to understand student behaviors before being able to properly utilize behavior strategies or interventions. When describing behaviors, participants often described student behaviors as a significant barrier to successful inclusion. Participant 1 (General Education) described the behavior of her students and how she worked with her co-teacher to problem-solve around behaviors:

> We had a student who was high on the autism spectrum. He was a 10th grader and was in a ninth grade class because of transferring and he didn't like men. He didn't get along well with men at all. And so when, when my co-teacher would ask him to do something, he wouldn't do it. And so we've learned to tag team that if there he would come, [my co-teacher] would quietly come to me.

This way of understanding behavior and problem-solving around that understanding was echoed by Participant 3 (Special Education), who discussed her experience with students who have behaviors, noting: "I mean I have been bitten. I have been kicked. I have been punched three times in the face. I was spat on this year by a four-year-old. Students are just more and more threatening now." She described understanding this behavior through a trauma-informed lens and the efforts she and the school have taken to try and better understand student behaviors.

In one instance, Participant 14 (Special Education) described understanding the student behaviors but being unable to effectively make changes to the student experiences due to a lack of understanding from other school staff members:

> I had a fifth grade student who really was a challenge in the general curriculum environment. He would pick on students. He got to the point where he and the teacher had an adversarial relationship where she would be just sarcastic with him and inappropriate really. And he knew it and he would feed off of it. So they would just go back and forth and back and forth. And he had a behavior plan. And one of the things that he was supposed to have was positive reinforcement for his behaviors. Verbal, verbal, if you told him he did a great job, he would just eat it up. But her delivery was not appropriate because she would say it in a sarcastic way. "Thanks for joining the group today." And he knew it, he knew it, so he would get to the group and then he would start doing things to the other group members. This is small group, like reading group. He would take things from other students. He would take things from her. It was just like, they were trying to tit for tat and it would just escalate. And as the year went on, it got, the behaviors increased and her anxiety increased and it just kept getting worse and worse and worse to the point where I didn't feel like I didn't feel like their relationship was salvageable, unless there was some sort of significant change from the teacher. And that really didn't happen.

With an understanding of student behaviors, teachers could continue working with students to manage those behaviors using specific strategies. Participants in this study cited the following strategies as being important in their management of behaviors: deescalation, rapport, positive behavior interventions and supports, and social stories.

Each of these strategies was utilized by participants with a detailed understanding of their student's needs and in a way that was intended to minimize the occurrence of the behaviors in order to help students access their learning more successfully.

Deescalation. Participant 15 (special education) described working with a student with significant interfering behaviors, emphasizing the fact that her school district decided that the best approach to deescalation was to remove the other students from the classroom and allow the student time to calm down without speaking to him or engaging him:

> So, I would say within five to 10 minutes after we had kind of just calmly come in and just sat calmly. And, while I didn't speak to him at first, I started to address him. and he came over and he talked to us about the issue. And, as we kind of, we had already established a good relationship. So as he calmly explained to me what had happened, he started to recognize that no, it was not okay for him to throw the items on the floor. And so he accepted responsibility for that and picked them up, put them away. And then, we explained to him that it was towards the end of the day so we didn't think that it would be a good idea for him to be riding the bus 'cause he still was a little steamed and he accepted that fact and, kind of, was more willing to, and more accepting of the fact that he would not be riding the bus or going to daycare, whatever that particular case was for that day and that his dad would be picking him up.

Participant 3 (Special Education) described the importance of deescalation and its usefulness to herself and the teachers within her school:

> And we have a restraint system. Mandt, I don't know if you've heard of Mandt. That's what we use. And the first day is all about how to avoid escalation. And so many teachers don't realize the cues of escalation and what to do if they did recognize those cues. So I pushed for years to have everyone at least get a condensed version of that first day, the interpersonal skills of Mandt. And we finally have done that. And you know, teachers are just amazed. They're like, Oh, I never thought of that. Um, one of my students last year, um, Oh he was, he was just, he's in a separate facility now. He is unable to um, stay in a regular classroom and um, function. He would blow up and his teacher was constantly and you know, fussing at him and everything… We did a functional behavioral assessment and then a functional behavioral plan. We did the behavior intervention plan and I put specifically in there to only use words when the

> student is escalated to protect them, to keep them safe. And to give three options instead of two because two is an ultimatum. Three really gives them more of a choice. She hadn't, she had never thought of that and it never occurred to her that when he's screaming and yelling, he's not hearing a word she says anyway, you know, and it's real. It really is. They did the whole graphic of the escalation deescalation cycle and it was, it was eye-opening for a lot of people. It was very eye-opening.

Rapport. This type of de-escalation is helpful when a school staff member has rapport with the student, which Participant 15 (Special Education) mentioned later when discussing the same incident. Participant 1 (General Education) added her thoughts on the concept of rapport by describing how she starts to develop relationships with her students:

> I stand at my door every day and we're supposed to be in the hall anyway. But even before that was a requirement, I always did. I greet my students as they come in. I try to greet them by name. If I see them in the hall at a different time of the day, I still greet them by name. I think it's important that you connect with them and that you know them and especially the student doesn't feel like you don't like them. I still want to make sure that I speak to them and engage with them. And so I think connecting with them on a personal level is important.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) are also vital in managing student behaviors. For each of the participants discussing PBIS, tier III supports were described. Tier III supports are those supports that are individualized for a particular student based on his or her individual needs. Participants described some informal positive reinforcement procedures as well as detailed and structured plans. One participant (Participant 1, General Education) described her individualized positive reinforcement system as being very informal and consisting of a visit to the library assistant if he completes his work. Another informal procedure included providing the student with a "first/if, then" structure for working. This meant that the student had to complete a task and was able to earn a thing. For

example, as described by Participant 12 (General Education), " Hey, if you do this then we can all watch a video." Participant 12 (General Education) described how she strategically planned her lessons so that videos and engaging activities would follow non-preferred work, and then used it as positive reinforcement. Participant 6 (Special Education) extended on the use of the if, then system and the use of a structured chart: "we used, he had a really hard time staying still and focused. So we used a visual timer and we also used an if, then chart. So if you do the daily quiz and the notes, then you can break for a snack. And then after the snack we would start over. If you do the notes and the activity, then you can have a computer break. And so that kind of helped him."

Participant 11 (Special Education), also described using informal PBIS through natural reinforcement with peers engaging her student:

> We would push him into the middle of the room. He's surrounded by all his friends and he just would you just see him glowing and the teacher, because he was more right in the middle of things, he got called on a lot more. The kids would say, "Oh gee, oops, Oh Jay has a question," all this stuff. So he started participating more and he's definitely one of those kiddos where he was so bright, but it was getting it out of him. Getting the words out after you figured out your behaviors to get the word out. That was a wonderful success for him.

Participant 11 (Special Education), also described using a formal PBIS system in the form of a token board for her student:

> Another really cool success story with another kid I'll call IB. He was extremely aggressive, could not work for more than five seconds. And it took a year. But by the end of the year he was 100% following the classroom routine. We had 90 minute periods and in a 90 minute period, he was on his star system. You earn five stars, you get the iPad. And in that 90 minute period, he would earn an iPad three times, which was huge because we were working on, "Oh my God, just, just don't hurt us for five stars and here's your iPad." So by the end of the year, we're at a 90 minute period and he's worked 60 of those minutes. And that was just amazing. And so he's doing his work. He's tapping kids on the shoulder to facilitate communication. He's walking his work up independently to the teacher handing it to the teacher. And he just did everything we expected of him and you know, he earned his time. So 30 minutes of that 90 minute period were spent doing videos. But the cute part about that is when it was time for videos, the class

> would actually ask him what he was watching. So we felt like also in a way that it was a break for the rest of the class and then they were communicating with him. So it just became fantastic for him for inclusion and behavior and academic.

Similar to a token system, Participant 16 (Special Education), described the use of a daily point sheet with a student:

> The most successful inclusion that I saw was for one of my students who was in third grade at the time. He had cerebral palsy and hemiparesis so the right half of his body was paralyzed. He could talk but it was very jumbled and difficult to understand at times and he also drooled a lot. On top of that he had epilepsy and a mood disorder so he could be quite aggressive. So when I came to him, he was basically all alone by himself because of his aggressive behaviors. He was slightly below grade level but I think that was mostly because he had been pulled out of all of his classes since October and at this point it was February. So, I worked with him to develop a point sheet for his behavior.
>
> He got points for having a safe body, completing his work, being respectful, and being organized. So, after each subject he would sit down and write himself and then tally up his points. And the best part about this was that he would engage in self-reflection. So he might say, "You know in the cafeteria I threw my tray on the ground so I didn't get my three points for that. I probably only got one point." This was important because in the past he didn't have any of that self-reflection so he would just rage for hours. We also worked on really explicit teaching of coping mechanisms so we talked about what we might do if someone in our class put their foot out to trip us intentionally-that actually happened- and how it could be handled in a way that wouldn't get the student in trouble.

Social Stories. Sometimes, students are unable to manage their behaviors without explicit teaching and instruction around what is expected of them regarding their behaviors. Participant 7 (Special Education) described how social stories were helpful in teaching appropriate social behaviors to her student:

> We had a really awesome teacher who was very technology savvy who created- they took the pictures with the student and with the other peers from that student's classroom to build the story book or to build a social story and then played it back for the student. And they really, really bought into that. And began interacting with that student, began interacting with his peers much more appropriately and frequently referred to his personal social stories that he then began creating. It's really awesome to see a second grader creating a social story. It's really cool.

The Need for Training. The training received by school staff members was an important topic within the subtheme of classroom strategies. This is because the training provided to teachers impacts their practice and implementation of teaching. As mentioned above, twelve participants cited their university program as the primary source of training on inclusive education, and all participants who discussed learning about inclusive education in their university programs described learning about them through behavior or introduction to disability courses. There were two participants who described having no formal training through their university or school district programs. There were thirteen participants who described receiving training through the school district, but all participants described the training as being short and in limited scope. When describing training from the school district itself, many participants shared the sentiment that they needed more training and that they learned from doing the work on inclusion. Participant 10 (General Education) stated:

> The only training I've had is just having to do it. The first year I ever taught. I think maybe the second year, first year, second year I had a co-teacher, but I had no idea what to do and we just kind of, he would just show up for like one period and then he would leave and we didn't really plan together or teach together or anything like that. So it was not very effective.

Still other participants described observing teachers who were already providing an inclusive education to their students (Participant 4, Special Education) or asking questions of veteran teachers who were perceived as having knowledge of inclusive practices (Participant 3, Special Education).

Some participants described receiving a small amount of training via webinars or similar mediums that allowed them to participate in short one hour training focused on inclusion. This is important because participants need to be provided with training so that

they can have an understanding of both their students' needs and how to meet them in the most appropriate manner.

Content Teaching Strategies. When describing access to the general education classroom setting, participants described the need to utilize multiple strategies to ensure their students had access to the curriculum and its content. These content teaching strategies were utilized to provide students with access points that allowed them to learn the academic content being taught in the classroom. The topics within this subtheme included differentiation, scaffolding, modifying content, explicit instruction, memory aids/ repetition/ spiral review, preteaching, small group instruction, and technology. These topics were specifically discussed by participants as being utilized to teach content to students with complex support needs.

Differentiation, Scaffolding, Modifying Content. Content differentiation, scaffolding, or modification were discussed by eleven participants as strategies important for including their students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting. For some participants, differentiation was employed in the teaching process, while others employed it through the formative assessment process. One participant, Participant 5 (Special Education), discussed her experience in teaching the microscope to a group of high school students and noted that:

> When we were going into the microscope, a lot of them hadn't had hands on with them. A lot of them were a little shy of turning the knobs. So I gave them the alternative version of letting them do it virtually. So when they started doing the microscope, labeling the microscope parts on doing virtual learning, they were really surprised that they could have that choice. So that particular lesson plan, it worked out fine because we had the version where they had the hands on the physical microscope and then for the ones who didn't want to handle the microscope and the. specimens that they were using to look, they could do it virtually. So they were cool with moving the objects on the microscope. They were cool, were putting the lenses under the light in the scope. So that was a very,

> it went very smoothly. But that was one instance when I can say that we gave a, we connected them to their learning style.

When discussing differentiation, Participant 1 (General Education) discussed differentiation and ensuring that students can access content through the differentiation process. She added:

> I think it's important that you don't treat students differently. That we want to treat students, I do believe in equity, kids sometimes don't understand that life isn't always fair. I don't want to treat everyone fairly. I want to treat everyone equitably and so maybe somebody needs something extra to get them to the same level. But it's recognizing what that is. So maybe we're doing an activity and maybe one kid needs me to narrow down his choices to four while another kid can take all 20 and figure them out. And so just to level that playing field so that they're both getting what they need.

Some participants discussed ways to modify final products that allowed students to show their learning. Participant 8 (Special Education), discussed allowing multiple means of representation of learning as follows:

> We had one student specifically who was a non-reader. So what did I do? You want to give the student materials whereby they're not really juvenile, but they're at his level. We did some flashcards for a student so he could learn the words. We also did short passages, let the student use the computer to find what was he interested in and he learned a lot or he liked comics. So what we did was we would let him read comics and make comic strips and also posters and also just letting him use his own voice and his narrative to create the type of learning style that best suited him. And this particular student also could draw. So basically once he drew the pictures, then we would help him with the words and that's how we saw him progress and we found what we do or as well as myself, we find the student's strengths and then build upon them, found out strengths in order to build upon their weaknesses.

Scaffolding was also described as an important part of providing access to the general education curriculum. Participant 4 (Special Education) described her use of scaffolding and chunking in the content area of math.

> ...Taking it down to the basics for solving equations or something, take it back down to one step that they should have learned two years ago and say, “okay, let's just do 20 problems.” Just subtracting four from each side, adding to both sides,

> that kind of thing. But really breaking it down to its basics. A lot of kids I work with have processing issues so they can't do- just because they learned it doesn't mean they can go in and do a four step equation. They have to go back and do the one step over and over and over again and I think that's where I see the, yeah, I think that's where I see a lot of improvement is if I can break it down into smaller chunks or something like that.

In some instances, participants described their work for inclusion as being a combination of scaffolding and modifying the content. Participant 6 (Special Education) described her experiences with successful inclusion as a special education teacher for students with significant disabilities in an inclusive setting as being heavily rooted in modifying content and scaffolding work with fill-in-the-blank spaces.

> So we actually had three students with complex needs. And so I worked with the two students who were kind of more higher functioning. And then my IA worked with my student who needed more one-on-one. We used pretty much the same power points the teacher was using, but we focused on one big idea per slide. Or per couple of slides. And we would talk about that. Big idea with pictures. They would actually fill in slot notes just like the rest of the class was doing; only it was one note, one line per slide or couple of slides.

She also discussed the importance of scaffolding and modifying content, and provided samples of the modifications she made with her students (See Appendix F). Participant 6 (Special Education) also discussed the use of content modification as a method to provide reading information to her students that matches the information being provided to her peers.

Content modification was used across settings, sometimes with general modifications provided to a student for all subjects. For example, Participant 11 (Special Education) described modifying content for a student and indicated that her student received all materials with more color and in larger print, but that he was learning the same content as his peers.

Two participants specifically discussed the use of modified novels and texts, with one participant (Participant 7-Special Education) describing the purchase of adapted texts for students to use during a collaborative book study and one participant (Participant 6-Special Education) describing her efforts to modify texts for her students on her own. She described the process of teaching students with the modified content:

> I use Google slides and I modify the text, so they're essentially getting the same story. So we've done *Most Dangerous Game*, *Romeo and Juliet*, we did *Macbeth*. They're able to get the same content, only modified down. We use picture ID cards, we use lots and lots of visuals. So visual learning. I was thinking for some of my students who are nonverbal, we use those talking buzzers so we can actually record answers into different buzzers and then they can actually tap on the buzzer. So, if we can record " I know the answer" in the buzzer then they can hit the buzzer and then we could call on them. Then do white board choices.

Another participant, Participant 8 (Special Education), also engaged in creative practices to modify the content and setting of her student's learning while still ensuring the learning occurred in a general education environment with peers. She discussed the importance of modifying work for her student and providing the modifications in a practical and applicable way:

> Say for example, learning to count money. We did actually use money. We also-they had a store at that particular time at the middle school and this student was able to work in the store. So making the application not only in the classroom but also within the school. And also the mom was working with him at home and then when she went to make purchases, she would give him money and she would say, "Well, how much do you get back if you have $5, how much are you going to get back?"

Two participants specifically discussed art class as a time when content needed to be modified for their students with significant disabilities for physical needs. Participant 14 (Special Education) described her student's art experience, noting that "art was a really difficult subject for him because, he just was not tactile, that was not his thing. So she would adapt things for him because he couldn't grip a pencil. So he would have big

fat crayons instead of a tiny pencil when doing drawing or using hand over hand motions. And the art teacher would sometimes help with that."

Participant 13 (Special Education) also described art and the unique challenges it presented for her student, noting that:

> We figured out in art that if we tape the corners down, he doesn't have the dexterity to get his hand underneath the paper. So we just tape it down. And somebody, one of the kids who's at his table group, is responsible for taping his paper down. He does hand over hand. We're not using different materials that- so if they're using color pastels, we give him color pastels. He does not on his own make marks on a paper. So he does have that support to do that. But it's good because he's doing exactly the same thing at his level with the same materials.

Explicit Instruction. One participant also discussed the importance of explicit instruction for students with disabilities, but largely as it relates to behavior. Participants discussed modeling appropriate social behaviors as well as appropriate physical behaviors. Participant 16 (Special Education) discussed her most important success story as it relates to seeing success after explicit instruction:

> The most successful inclusion that I saw was for one of my students who was in third grade at the time. He had cerebral palsy and hemiparesis so the right half of his body was paralyzed. He could talk but it was very jumbled and difficult to understand at times and he also drooled a lot. On top of that he had epilepsy and a mood disorder so he could be quite aggressive. So when I came to him he was basically all alone by himself because of his aggressive behaviors. He was slightly below grade level but I think that was mostly because he had been pulled out of all of his classes since October and at this point it was February. So, I worked with him to develop a point sheet for his behavior. He got points for having a safe body, completing his work, being respectful, and being organized. So, after each subject he would sit down and write himself and then tally up his points. And the best part about this was that he would engage in self-reflection. So he might say, "You know in the cafeteria I threw my tray on the ground so I didn't get my three points for that. I probably only got one point." This was important because in the past he didn't have any of that self-reflection so he would just rage for hours. We really worked on really explicit teaching of appropriate behaviors and coping mechanisms so we talked about what we might do if someone in our class put their foot out to trip us intentionally-that actually happened- and how it could be handled in a way that wouldn't get the student in trouble.

Memory Aids/ Repetition/ Spiral Review. Some participants also discussed utilizing memory aids and repetition of concepts to support student learning. Participant 1 (General Education) discussed her significant experience working as a co-teacher and the importance of repetition and memory aids for all students, not just her students with intellectual disabilities. Mnemonic devices, specifically, were helpful for her students. For example, Participant 1 stated: "We have these different sayings like peanut butter and jelly, which is Palestine, Britain and Jordan. So Britain controlled Palestine and Jordan as mandates. The fat lady sings, France controlled Lebanon and Syria. And so things like that, any kind of techniques that would help anybody learn."

Participant 1 described the use of these tools across concepts and units of study, noting that it helped her students learn concepts about the circulatory system, historical figures, and historical concepts such as the industrial revolution. Repetition was vital in her teaching and was cited as a strategy that supported all of her students:

> I do a lot of repetition and so I'm going to, if I'm teaching them that new thing, I want to ask that at least five, six times in the class. And we're constantly going back to, so say for example, we're talking about how Stalin was an absolute ruler. And so speaking of absolute rulers think back for a minute guys, what is it? What does it mean to be an absolute rule? What were the two things you had to have? Who are some of those absolute rulers that we talked about? So that constant spiral review and that's going to help all kids, but it's especially going to help your kids who are lower ability and need that constant repetition of the key things. Participants also discussed the importance of reviewing learning across units so

that students can solidify their understanding of vocabulary and concepts. This linking of knowledge can be very helpful for students with disabilities in order to help them make connections with teacher support. Repetition was also used in informal settings, such as teaching students the routine of going through the lunch line appropriately so that they could eat lunch and socialize with their peers. This involved practicing going through the

lunch line and teaching the expectations for the lunch line, including leaving additional snacks on the counter.

Preteaching. Preteaching was also used by multiple participants as a means of exposing students to content and helping to familiarize them with it before it was taught in the general education classroom. Participant 3 (Special Education), described the way preteaching helped to enhance her student's understanding of content and their ability to participate in class:

> We have a special ed director who really jumped on and pushed pre-teaching for the kids, so they would feel more confident that that was, that was maybe four years ago. And he really was pushing pre-teaching, pre-teaching, pre-teaching, give these kids some confidence. And so then that was when I started talking with the other classroom teachers. They were like, Oh, sure. And shared things with me. And then I would pull them for a little bit and we'd work on classwork. Then I'd give him a little bit more about what they're going to have the next day or the next week. And so they could feel like they could participate.

Participant 8 (Special Education) extended on the importance of preteaching by discussing how she used it in specific subjects with her students. She noted that:

> And so as students are doing pre- reading activities like vocabulary and anticipation guides, I would probably pull my student out and pre-read the story with them. That way when they're doing that story in class with their peers, they have an idea about what's going on. So, this would just be an example. Long ago two families were living in Verona. Capulets and the Montagues. The Capulets and the Montague's were enemies. We would stop and talk about enemies and so we would do this.

Small Group Instruction. Small group instruction was utilized by participants in an inclusive setting to provide their students with a deeper understanding of a concept. Some participants used small groups in their co-taught classrooms through station teaching, which allowed them to work with students in small groups on a variety of concepts to ensure understanding.

Other participants discussed utilizing small group instruction by pulling students who require special education as well as students who do not outside of the general education classroom setting to teach small concepts for short periods of time. This allowed the teacher to review a concept and re-teach some of the concepts that may have been missed. Participant 1 (General Education) discussed her strategic use of pull-out:

> We split up our class sometimes, just having a smaller class setting. A lot of accommodations have smaller testing or whatever and we break up not just for testing but we'll take, and it's not just the SPED kids, we mixed them up so that they don't ever feel, they don't feel targeted. But just to get them in a smaller group so they might feel more comfortable asking questions. I've also, so because I have such a high SPED population, I've done a lot of different lessons that I designed specifically to try to engage them.

Participant 4 (Special Education) elaborated on this and discussed some of the techniques used in small groups to help enhance student learning:

> It's best when I can break stuff down for them into smaller units or when I can, adjust the weight. Okay, we've shown you two ways to do it. So let me show you a third way and a fourth way… the two teachers I work with this year are really good about if I go in and say, okay, I need to work with some students and I need to back them up to this point, I can take the kids out on a couple of kids out of the room and take them to an empty classroom and work with them one on one or one on two to get them to try to understand the concepts… I try to have the students if possible when I'm working in a small group, explain it to me. Don't just do the problem, but explain to me what you're doing in each step so that as if I don't know what I'm doing and teach it to me basically. And that helps me because I can see if there's a gap in their thinking or their understanding of it.

Technology. Technology has become very important in providing students with access to their educational environment and became even more important during the development of this dissertation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Students, both those with disabilities and those without, were forced to learn from home through the use of technologies such as iPads, Seesaw, and Google Classroom.

Teachers described using technology as a way to provide students with physical disabilities with access to their education through technology to support communication,

introduce and explain concepts, and demonstrate understanding of content. There were ten participants who specifically discussed the importance of technology in providing their students with access to the inclusive education environment.

With regards to communication, some students utilized technology to be able to communicate their thoughts as well as engage with their peers. Participant 11 (Special Education) discussed the importance of using assistive technology devices to help her students communicate with both the teacher and peers as well as understand concepts such as prepositions. Participant 2 (General Education) also discussed the use of technology to support communication and noted that the team utilizes typing on a cell phone for one of their students with a significant disability who is non-verbal. Participant 9 (Special Education) also discussed the use of technology in the form of GoNoodle videos to support her students in engaging in social interactions with peers.

Technology used to introduce concepts was frequently utilized by participants, which may be related to the changing educational environment that emphasizes the use of technology. Participant 5 (Special Education), discussed her use of technology to teach students about the microscope:

> You could actually use a software to label the parts of the microscope. So when we were going into the microscope, a lot of them hadn't had hands on with them. A lot of them were a little shy of turning the knobs. So I gave them the alternative version of letting them do it virtually. So when they started doing the microscope, labeling the microscope parts on doing virtual learning, they were really surprised that they could have that choice. So that particular lesson plan, it worked out fine because we had the version where they had the hands on the physical microscope and then for the ones who didn't want to handle the microscope and the. specimens that they were using to look, look at, they could do it virtually. So they were cool with moving the objectives on the microscope. They were cool, putting the lenses under the light in the scope. So that went very smoothly.

Participant 6 (Special Education) described her use of Google Slides (See Appendix F) in order to provide her students with access to the general education

curriculum through adapted texts. These texts were modified to reduce the complexity of the stories but provided the same storyline in a simplified manner. This allowed her students to engage with the grade level content at an access point that fit their needs.

Participant 10 (General Education), extended on the idea of teaching content using technology by discussing the success of one of her students with the most complex needs during virtual learning:

> So I have a student currently with lots of physical disabilities, you have to write for her and she speaks- for writing an essay or something, she dictates it into a computer program. And she uses walkers to get around and vision issues and she has lots of physical disabilities, but she's pretty bright. And strangely this whole learn from home craziness that we're having to do right now, I feel like she has done better now than when she was in a regular school setting. It's not just that her writing is better, it's just she seems way more engaged right now. And so I almost wish we could have done that more during the regular school year.

Participants also discussed the importance of utilizing technology in allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of concepts. Specific programs were mentioned, including Google Classroom, Seesaw, and text-to-speech programs such as Read, Write, Gold and Google Read&Write. Participants utilized Google Classroom and the Google Suite (Google Slides, etc.) to provide students with worksheets and assignments to show their understanding.

Participant 9 (Special Education) utilized iPads and the program Seesaw to help her students complete all grade level content and work:

> So I actually was able to get all of my students iPad distributed from our school just based on their needs and of FAPE. So now everything that the first graders are doing, I'll take that exact paper and then I'll put it on Seesaw right and modify it for what they can do. So we were just working on initial consonant blends and digraphs so kids were working on building words out of different letter sounds. And there's a little chart. So I just took that same chart, screenshot a bunch of the little parts of it and we just did a matching game with it. So things like that where

> right now, especially, I have to just work off of what everybody else is given because that's what all of the families know to receive.

Text-to-speech programs were also helpful in providing students with more independence. Participant 3 (Special Education) discussed the use of the Google Read&Write text-to-speech program as a means of providing her students with a read aloud accommodation in a non-invasive way that did not reveal their needs to other students in the classroom. Participant 2 (General Education) shared similar observations:

> We had one student who was a nonverbal and also physically paralyzed from the legs down, and much of his torso as well. He was not intellectually disabled at all. but we needed to find some solutions to help him communicate his knowledge with us. And so, I think the best combination that we experienced is that we had great teamwork and cohesiveness between me and the co-teacher as well as his paraprofessional aide. And we were able to get some technology assistance through Read Write Gold.

Overall, students who required read aloud accommodations or support during learning were able to receive them in a discreet manner when given access to technology that allowed them to simply put on a pair of headphones and listen to the text being read aloud to them.

Planning and Monitoring for Program Outcomes

When talking about how they made meaning of the inclusive education program being provided to their students, all participants discussed how they monitored the success of the inclusive program, as well as the actions they took during the ongoing monitoring process. This theme of planning and monitoring for inclusion was separate from the theme of needing strategies to provide students with access to the inclusive education program, but planning and monitoring the program were described as important to participants in making meaning of the inclusive program, the focus of research question 3. Participants described following and monitoring IEPs, observing the

student and measuring student performance, and level of social engagement as vital in measuring the outcomes of the inclusive program.

At a fundamental level, school staff members can determine if inclusion is working by looking at individual students and searching for growth. Participant 10 (General Education), summarized her feelings about how to measure whether inclusion is working, stating, “If inclusion is working, I feel like the students with disabilities are making progress. The regular students are making progress, the advanced students are making progress, but it has to be on an individual basis.”

Understanding Students and Observing Student Growth This thought process around inclusive education is based on individual student need and lends itself to a student dependent evaluation of the success of the inclusive education program. Participant 10 continued her thoughts by saying, “Just tracking every student, I think it's hard to, it's hard to look at a class as a whole and measure anything because it's just my second period and your second period. We can't compare test scores. They're not the same kids. But if we look at every individual student where they start and are they showing growth.”

These thoughts were shared by multiple participants, who described utilizing grades to measure growth as opposed to simply seeing how many students received an “A.” Participant 1 (General Education) articulated this idea, saying, “ I believe in data. I'm a big fan of data. So we are tracking our kids from the very beginning. And when you come into my class and you get a 25 and you're now getting 45s, I'm happy you've shown some growth. and so it's really more about, are we seeing growth?”

In addition to grades, participants described administering benchmark testing and progress monitoring their students to look at their reading progress (Participant 2, General Education). Participant 5 (Special Education) extended on this idea by discussing how students with disabilities are specifically monitored:

> We do a lot of data calculating and we do have, I don't know if you call your students SWD students, but we have them dis-aggregated in our data charts. So each week when we use our data chart where it's input the biweekly assessment, we look at the biweekly assessment of the inclusion students and we look at the general ed students.

Following and Monitoring IEPs. All students with disabilities who have IEPs have individualized goals that are directly related to their needs and areas of growth. Goals are developed based on identified areas of need and then tracked according to the accuracy criterion of the goal. Participants identified IEP goal mastery as an important way of making meaning of inclusion for their students with complex support needs. Participant 16 (Special Education) described using IEP goal mastery as a way to measure the success of inclusive education:

> I also look at IEP goal mastery. You know, are students mastering their IEP goals or are they not making progress and what can be added to help them make progress if they aren't making any? I also look at where the behaviors are occurring and see if they are occurring more in one setting because sometimes that is a factor.

Often, students with complex support needs have IEP goals focused on academic skills as well as behavior or social emotional skills. Participant 14 (Special Education) described her process for considering both academic and behavioral goals:

> I guess with extreme behaviors, we measure it by taking data on the behaviors and how often the behaviors occur. And that might be in those situations. That's probably the easiest way to observe. The students who don't have the extreme behaviors, it's a little trickier, because I think the measurement ends up in how well they're achieving their goals, their IEP goals, but also how they're doing in the classroom environment. And it's not just academically, it's obviously it's socially. And, sometimes it's hard to get a check in on how they feel because

> especially my students who don't really relate to expressing their emotions necessarily, that can be, that can be a challenge, but more than anything, it's, it's how they're doing with their goals, their IEP goals and, somewhat their academic performance.

Additionally. Teachers cited observations as being vital in supporting their data collection of student progress. The observations proved useful in monitoring student progress, especially in the area of behavior. There were nine participants who also discussed completing observations as a meaningful part of measuring whether inclusion is working.

Additionally, participants discussed observing students practicing concepts and materials in class as a means of measuring the success of inclusion. Participant 1 (General Education) discussed her use of practice materials:

> It's not just tests because of course all students are not good test takers. But it's also looking at that practice material. It's also, I'm a big question or I'm going to ask you a question in class. I want you to engage with me. And can you do that? Can you answer the material? Do you need to take a little bit more time than student Z who has their hand in the air every five seconds? I'm not going to call him every time. I want everybody to get a chance.

Changes in Social Engagement. Other participants also discussed the level of social engagement as being important to measuring whether inclusion is meaningful. Participant 9 (Special Education) discussed the importance of having her students included socially:

> I would say that the social skills goals that a lot of my students have would reflect that. . But I think overall the way that I can gauge if it's working or not is if kids that are in my class are being included in other things when we're not around. If a kid is actually getting invited to a birthday or for Valentine's day, if the kids in our buddy class make Valentines for the students in my class as well, things like that. Also schoolwide things. It's just kind of the nature of the gig where people get forgotten a little bit more. This year we were left off of all of the visual performing arts rotations and I was like well, Nope, we're supposed to get dance class and music class and everything too. So let's figure that out. And if there's no

> spots, we're going to join other classes. So things like that, being included in all of those things. Definitely a big way to tell.

Participant 3 (Special Education) also discussed the importance of outside events and their impact on measuring successful inclusion:

> I look at interpersonal skills when they communicate and interact with other students. When I have a parent who comes to me and they say, my child has never been invited to a birthday party, they were invited this year. That is huge. That is huge. And you, and you see them interacting appropriately, taking turns. The best thing is when you see him displaying empathy and sympathy. The social-emotional and mental wellbeing of my students. When I see that, I know they can learn anything. You know, that they're capable of learning. But if they don't feel safe, if they don't feel appreciated, if they don't feel respected, I'm not gonna get anything out of him and neither will anyone else.

In addition to social engagement at special events, nine participants discussed social engagement during unstructured times at school as a means of measuring the success of inclusion. Participant 16 (Special Education) described how she measures success for her students with complex support needs by first modeling and then monitoring the continued engagement of her students:

> Last year I had a kindergarten student who was blind and in a wheelchair. She had a brittle bone disorder so there were a lot of restrictions on how she could be handled and what she could do. So recess was always really hard for her. She often sat in her Rifton chair and watched the other kids play. Everyone knew her and would ask her to play all the time but she had a nurse who would kind of shelter her from everything and say no. So one day she was sitting on the side of the school crying and with help from me another student set up a game of duck, duck, goose and over 45 students played. They kept playing the game throughout the rest of the school year until Covid hit.

Structured times for social engagement and interaction were also discussed by seven participants. These included social engagement during group activities and other structured class times. Participant 5 (Special Education) referenced social engagement during structured group review tasks:

> We all put them in groups to play Kahoots. And so it's not individual competition, it’s a group competition. So hypothetically, I just off the top of my head, I just

> think that we just did, everybody that had on tennis shoes that day or everybody had on boots were in a group. So we divide them all up based on colors or whatever gear they had on. And say for instance, we say, okay, everybody with boots in this group. Everybody with tennis shoes in this group. Everybody with sandals in this group. So they would work together and come up with the answers for Kahoot. And they enjoy working together, collaboratively in the, in the interactive game of Kahoot. So it wasn't any peer pressure. I've seen the students, with special needs take control. I've seen them be passive aggressive. I've seen various elements of their personalities come out when they work in groups together and we're behind the scenes cheerleading them on.

During morning meeting, Participant 3 (Special Education) also noticed one of her students with a complex disability participating meaningfully and socializing with peers over time:

> I have a student in first grade who has, he gets every service we have. He gets academic, he gets OT, he gets PT, he gets speech, every service we can give in our building. Last year he wouldn't participate in anything. And, his speech is incredibly difficult to understand. He's got hyper nasality so it's all just right, it all seems to come out of his nose. So we're trying to really work a lot on him, feeling the breath come out of his mouth and he wouldn't participate in anything. Even if non-verbally he wouldn't touch a button, he wouldn't do anything. This year, another student, they had a student of the day who does all the math and you know, what day is it? What's 10 less than this number? What's 10 more? You ask all those questions in first grade. And a student asked him to be his helper to touch the numbers on the smart board on the hundred grid. And he did. And I recorded it first and showed it to her and she was just beside herself. And I recorded him one day during the pledge of allegiance with the kids. But the best day, this teacher had to be out for a week. So a substitute was in there. And we always put this kid's name, we always said, are you ready? Are you ready to be the student of the day? And so, but the substitute didn't know and he had already picked the student of the day before I got in there and it was the student and he was up there at the front calling on other students to answer questions and he picked a helper. And one of the things they started working on was money. And he'll go, he would hold up, a picture of a dime. You go, he'd say, and they knew, what is this? I mean, and they recognized their names when he called them out. So I'd ask them, what is it? How much is it worth? How many does it take to make a dollar? And then they get to do different voices. And so he asks for the, I think he asks for the underwater voice because it's, it's just funny and he doesn't stand out as much when they do it. And they go, they do a cool voice like Mr. quarter, bro. Or you do a ghost voice. We do a French voice and I have a video of him doing that and I showed it to his mom and we just both sobbed because we never, we really didn't think we get to see that in a whole group setting. We were seeing it in small group, but we never thought we'd see it in whole group this year. And it was, it was, it was a sight to behold and again, something that will

> never be assessed but was hugely successful for him and seeing that his classmates respected him and didn't say one word about his speech impediment. They just answered his questions.

Other participants discussed the importance of creating social engagement and facilitating it so that gradually students will engage with each other naturally. All of the participants described instances of social engagement for their students that demonstrated positive social interactions, and each participant discussed this as a way of showing success in an inclusive environment.

Transition Planning. One participant in this study discussed transition planning as being important in planning for inclusive success. Participant 5 (Special Education) discussed the need for a better plan for transitioning students with complex support needs to the next level of schooling (middle or high school):

> I spoke to you a few minutes ago about the ninth graders having that rug pulled from under them when they come in from eighth grade self-contained to an all inclusive classes. I don't believe that on the eighth grade level there is enough preparation for that transition to take place. So when they get into ninth grade, they're thrown in the classroom for 90 minutes with 22 kids where they're used to 45 minutes and eight kids. That's a big transition in my world.
>
> I would have them come in maybe the second semester of their eighth grade year to an inclusive class on the high school level… Say for instance, the middle school that, um, is next door to us is in walking distance is basically a parking lot that divides the middle school and high school. If you remove that child for 45 minutes from the middle school environment for a whole semester every other day to that environmental science class, at least they could get a mindset of, "Okay, this is what I'm going to have to prepare myself mentally to do. This is how it's going to be done. And it's going to be 20 kids. It's gonna be 18 kids. It's not going to be eight."
>
> I believe that if they see it for a semester and get acclimated, I believe there's a model that can be designed to give them that transition where they come to high school for half a day, go to middle school, back to middle school for half a day, and not just the middle school, high school transition, but from elementary to middle, even though it may be eight kids in the fifth grade and eight kids in a

> class in eighth grade. At the end of the day when they transition more on a trial basis instead of just being thrown in with the wolves come September, I believe that the transition of going into an inclusive environment could be smoother.

With the exception of Participant 5 (Special Education), transition planning at any level of schooling was not discussed by any participants as an important topic in planning and monitoring inclusion.

Findings to Research Question 2

In this section, findings related to question 2 are discussed. Research question 2 is: What are the perceived facilitators of and barriers to successful inclusion of students with complex support needs? The finding that emerged around this question focused on the factors that helped to make inclusion successful for students with complex support needs. Within this theme, subthemes and topics under subthemes ended up being facilitators and barriers to facilitators in the inclusive environment. As discussed earlier, topics identified as factors supporting a successful inclusive experience were perceived as barriers to success when they were not present. The subthemes that emerged focused on relational factors, pedagogical factors, and physical factors. Each of these subthemes clustered around multiple topics relating to each type of factor.

Relational Factors

This study found that relational factors were an important subtheme in the inclusive education of students with complex support needs. There are multiple relational factors that seem to be noted as factors related to the inclusion of students with complex support needs. Relational factors included those which were related to interpersonal elements listed by participants. These included general communication among members

of the community, people and their perceptions of inclusion, administrators, parents, and student-related factors.

General Communication. General communication was cited by participants as important in inclusion, and was listed as extremely important in ensuring the success of students in an inclusive educational setting. Participant 1 (General Education) emphasized this point by saying, "So I think communication is really important. And I know if I'm having problems with a kid, I will seek out the other teachers to be like, 'What is this kid doing in your class? Are they like this in all their other classes?'"

Participant 14 (Special Education) continued this idea by discussing the importance of communication and its function as both a facilitator and a barrier in inclusion:

> I go to the general curriculum teacher and say, these are the best practices for dealing with this student and then the teacher and I have an open communication where we regularly check in, 'cause I'm not actually in the classroom with the student on a, every day, there are instructional assistants who do that. but the teachers who will come to me and say, "Hey, so, and so is doing this. Do you have any ideas?" That's, that's when it works the best. When the teachers don't come to me and don't communicate with me and don't tell me what's happening or the instructional assistant doesn't tell me that's the biggest barrier, because I don't know what's happening and I can't help something if I don't know that there's an issue.

Communication among student team members both at school and at home was specifically discussed as both a barrier and a facilitator, and was listed as a significant barrier by Participant 12 (General Education), who described how a lack of communication significantly impacted the experience of one of her students in school:

> I really kind of feel like if we can get past, if we can have a signed note from the parent that says we can discuss with each teacher, I think that would be super important because if I would've known this student had the issue, other than just OHI, it could have been so much different for his classroom experience. Other than just following checkboxes of sitting next to the door, quiet space, early leaving, late arrival, that sort of thing. I really think knowing the kid and knowing

> what they need and knowing what works best for them is kind of more important than what I get from a case manager because the case manager has 20 some people to keep up with. You know, if I, if, so I'll get the basics from the case manager, but then I really just like to know the kid. And sometimes parents are really great about helping you learn that. And sometimes parents are really not that great about it because they give them a lot of crutches that they don't need. So, part of that's just spending time getting to know all of my kids.

It is vital that staff members be able to collaborate and work together to support students. This was described as an important facilitator by twelve participants, and integral in the success of the inclusive setting. Participants described collaborative planning as vital in successful inclusion, and emphasized the importance of collaborating and sharing responsibility for students. When this shared responsibility is present, students can be successful.

One of the most helpful resources in an inclusive setting is having a co-teacher who is willing to communicate and supports the inclusive mission. Participant 15 (Special Education) discussed her perspective on this:

> I think it would have to really be just so great to have a collaborative and willing partnership between the general education and the special education teacher and any other resource staff. When you have a good partnership and you have the ability to plan and work together and strategize even if at times you may disagree about ways to go about working through a situation with a student or helping a student, just having those discussions and that planning and partnership. I think that's made inclusion worthwhile for sure. Yeah. That's, that's probably the most, that's the one thing that I think is the most helpful.

Participant 2 (General Education) made similar claims when describing his experiences with collaboration in the inclusive setting, emphasizing, “When teacher and paraprofessionals have been there [working together], it produces the best possible outcomes. Without the co-teachers and without the planning to have with those co-teachers and the paraprofessionals, I think we operate at a disadvantage.”

In addition to planning for students together, collaborating allows teachers to troubleshoot and problem solve student learning concerns. Students with disabilities are

also able to receive the accommodations and support they require when teachers work in a collaborative environment, as mentioned by Participant 2 (General Education):

> You have to approach the instruction from the fact that the student has disabilities and rather than just saying here's what I want to do, now let's tweak it for the student. Approaching it with the attitude of we have to reach this student. Let's start with the special ed teacher. Let's start with their concerns and then we'll bring in the gen ed on top and try to break that mold. Versus so many teachers, the gen ed says, look, this is what we're going to do. Figure it out, try to work in the accommodations.

Participant 1 (General Education) summarized this by discussing her experiences:

> In my collaborative setting, me and my co-teacher- one of the best compliments we ever got was when a department of education person came in, there was a tour in our school. They said that they couldn't tell who was a social studies teacher and who was the special education teacher. And I think that's what a true, successful classroom looks like is that my students know that they can ask me or [my co-teacher], that we're both teaching the classroom, that it's not me teaching and he is like my aid.

People. Each of the members of the student's team are involved in the communication process, and, therefore, are important factors in the inclusive education experience. Staffing numbers as a factor that impeded successful inclusion were described by nine participants. For example, Participant 15 (Special Education) stated that "we've talked a lot within my, our special education team at the school about how wonderful it would be if we had a lot more teachers and we could just spread kids out or be in a classroom the whole day instead of jumping from classroom to classroom. But unfortunately, and especially with their current environment, that's not possible."

In this, and many other instances, people impede inclusion because there are not enough of them to provide adequate support. Participant 10 (General Education) discussed her concerns with available people being a barrier to inclusion:

> The biggest thing to me that creates a barrier is staffing. I think, and we have discussed it as an English department- if there's nine English teachers in our

> department, typically there are only three who have co-taught classes, but those lead to some very large classes. So the limitation is staffing as far as special ed staffing or paraprofessional staffing because there just aren't enough people to go around. It is the number one staff position that is, that's unfilled every year pretty much around the country. So we could do so much better than so much more if we had more staff I guess. So that's a barrier.

The type of help and support was also important, with Participant 10 (General Education) citing the importance of having a qualified co-teacher for making inclusion successful:

> It's really helpful to have an actual licensed co-teacher. And we also typically have a licensed, I guess we call them behavior coaches, but they're more like mental health services. And because of the kids that are usually in my room, there's usually like three adults at all times. And so that to me is a resource that is not an online program. It's not some box you can buy. But having trained professionals available at all times who would maybe just like be like, "Hey, let's take a walk and help a kid calm down for five minutes or come up with a plan for several different students." I believe it's called United healthcare. I think that's the thing that we use. But I don't know of any easy purchasable resources after 18 years. I can tell you that everybody wants to sell you a program and there's nothing better in the whole wide world than having valuable human resources.

For students with significant disabilities, the lack of sufficient staffing led to safety concerns and kept students from accessing their inclusive education, according to Participant 16 (Special Education):

> All the students were all in the same grade and they were included together in specials but only one paraprofessional was provided for support. So what ended up happening was that one paraprofessional couldn't support four students. So the students who did not engage in severe behaviors were allowed to sit in the class. The students who did have significant behaviors ended up being removed from the classroom and just walked in circles around the school for the entire lesson. This was a big problem because some of the students were academically capable of completing the work independently but needed reminders for attention and some of the students needed significant support to complete the work independently. There was also a student with pica who was left in the classroom alone and ended up eating hand sanitizer. Basically, inclusion didn't work for that group of students because they weren't provided with enough support from an adult and the adult became overwhelmed. What made it more difficult was that one of the students wore diapers and needed to be changed throughout the school day. So the paraprofessional would have to leave the other three students alone in the classroom while she went to change a diaper. Sometimes other students would get into things or elope from the classroom because they had no adult support. I

> think the issue was compounded because the school administration refused to provide any extra support so everyone felt overwhelmed including the general education teacher.

Participant 16 (Special Education) continued discussing the need for people to facilitate inclusion, stating, “You have to be willing to put forward the money to provide support for students with complex support needs if you want them to be successful. Sometimes this might mean adding an additional paraprofessional or something like that…”

Participant 9 (Special Education) described a model in her school where extra paraprofessionals were allocated for supporting inclusion:

> Paraprofessionals that assist with the behavior elements of a lot of the kids in our classes. so those paraprofessionals are there just to help with basically inclusion, which I think is so cool.

For students with significant physical needs and disabilities, paraprofessionals were sometimes assigned as an individual assistant to a student, which was described as helpful by some participants as well.

Half of participants indicated that the case manager or the special education teacher was the biggest and most effective factor in inclusion. The case manager or special education teacher was required to facilitate inclusion for their students with complex support needs for a variety of reasons including sharing information about the student and advocating for the student.

Participant 8 (Special Education) stated that the greatest factor in inclusion is “the case manager because this person knows about the student. He or she is able to advocate for this student and also to get the backing of the administrator on board.” These sentiments were echoed by Participant 3 (Special Education) who stated, “honestly I think that you need to have a special ed teacher be a facilitator, but I think they need to

work in conjunction with the gen ed teacher and it needs to be with, with teachers who are respected in the building."

This assertion is related to the statements made by other participants regarding advocacy as an important factor in inclusion. Special education teachers saw themselves as the most important advocates for inclusion. Participant 13 (Special Education), when asked about the greatest facilitator of inclusion, responded by saying, "Me. I'm the one who, who thinks of it. I'm the one who thinks of the ways that you can make it work. I'm the one who teaches the kids… . So, but yeah, I'm probably the one who pushes everything."

This advocacy was extended outside of the classroom, with Participant 13 (Special Education) discussing her efforts to ensure that her students, who are included in academic activities but considered a self-contained class, are included in all activities across the school:

> Advocating that if I happen to catch an announcement and it says the seventh grade students are doing whatever, I immediately go to either my principal or to the grade level chair and say, "Did you forget to give us a permission slip to that field trip"? Or I see that they're doing a fundraiser so that they can pay for something. You know, they have a cookout, the eighth graders have a cookout and they do a fundraiser. Did you forget to send us fundraising things? And most of the time they are very- they're "Oh yeah, yeah, I didn't even, I didn't even think about you." And so I think the best strategy is to just keep putting us there. my paras hate going to pep rallies and I get it. Probably a lot of the kids don't like them, they're loud and pointless. But it's important for the other school, for the rest of the school to see that we can do things.

Staff Perceptions. An important subtopic within this study was the role of staff perceptions around students and inclusive education itself. Participants discussed the need to change staff perceptions in order to effectively include their students. Participant

4 (Special Education) summed up her experience by saying, “From a special ed point of view, I feel like a lot of my time is spent trying to convince the general ed teachers that these kids aren't bad kids. They're not stupid kids.” She also discussed her experiences with teachers making assumptions about students and their abilities before even meeting them:

> The teacher, she saw the list and all the special ed students and 504 students had a little asterisk by their name. And she came to us and was very upset that she had three asterisks in her class. And this is an advanced class and we had to sit down with her to say: First of all, they're not asterisks, their children. Second, they are, you don't know the one. That-one is a math disability. And it has nothing to do with anatomy and physiology, it's not going to affect your class at all. And the ones that are dyslexic, we have supports in place to help them.

Staff perceptions were cited as a common barrier for school staff members, with Participant 11 (Special Education) stating that there is still a significant amount of fear around special education and that many people do not understand the mission of inclusive education.

Still Participant 4 (Special Education) discussed teachers as being a significant impediment in the success of inclusive education because they denied or did not understand the accommodations provided to the students with complex needs in the classroom. These concerns were amplified for some participants, who discussed the negative actions taken by teachers that overtly demonstrated a negative perception of their students. Participant 7 (Special Education) described an experience like this:

> We had a terrible experience last year with a math co-teaching pair where the general education teacher would announce at the beginning of the class, okay, all of special education students you guys need to go to so and so's room. You don't, you're not in this class, you're listed on here, but you're actually in her class. And would make that announcement publicly. And really call out the students as well as the teacher.

She continued discussing her concerns about teacher perceptions, stating:

> It's definitely that cultural mindset that, that we are continuing to work on shifting. We are a very small rural school that tends to be kind of behind the times in a lot of ways, especially with forward thinking. And we tend to do things, "Oh, that's the way we've always done them. Students with disabilities have always been pulled out into their special classroom and they've always been in the back of the hall doing their own thing and nobody kind of pays them any mind." So really shifting the cultural mindset set has been one of our biggest barriers. and that's with our teaching staff.

Other participants described having similar difficulties with changing the way things have always been done. Participant 14 (Special Education) discussed the impact of a teacher's refusal to change her practices to accommodate students:

> A couple of years ago I had a fifth grade student who really was a challenge in the general curriculum environment. He would pick on students. He got to the point where he and the teacher had an adversarial relationship where she would be just sarcastic with him and inappropriate really. and he knew it and he would feed off of it. So they would just go back and forth and back and forth. And he had a behavior plan. And one of the things that he was supposed to have was positive reinforcement for his behaviors, verbal- if you told him he did a great job, he would just eat it up. But her delivery was not appropriate because she would say it in a sarcastic way. Thanks for joining the group today. And he knew it, so he would get to the group and then he would start doing things to the other group members. This is small group reading group. He would take things from other students. He would take things from her. It was just- they were trying to tit for tat and it would just escalate. And as the year went on, the behaviors increased and her anxiety increased and it just kept getting worse and worse and worse to the point where I didn't feel like I didn't feel their relationship was salvageable, unless there was some sort of significant change from the teacher. And that really didn't happen.

Administrators. Administrators were described as integral to inclusive education, and participants discussed their roles in attending meetings and communicating information, providing support for teachers, stewarding a mission for the inclusive school, providing professional development and training, and monitoring and planning for inclusion.

School administrators, as the local education agency (LEA) representative, are required to attend special education IEP meetings. Their job is to ensure that the IEP

team and the IEP itself complies with the local and state regulations, as well as make sure that proper procedures are being followed. There were seven participants who discussed attending meetings as a primary role of their administrator, with two participants discussing the role of their administrator as one that also required attending IEP meetings to answer questions about the inclusive program. Participant 15 (Special Education) described her administrator's role in IEP meetings:

> They take part in all of our IEP meetings. And so when we're discussing services and so forth, they voice an opinion in the team discussion in terms of providing the least restrictive environment and services. So that is the, I think our assistant principal plays more of a role in terms of that inclusive practice and ensuring students do that.

With regards to communication, administrators were discussed as important in the communication process with parents because their role involves communicating information to parents in the community and helping them to understand what is happening at the school as well as volunteer opportunities (Participant 9, Special Education).

Support. Support was also listed as an important role of an administrator, both general support and mentorship and financial support. Participants cited general support as being engaged with the inclusive program and providing meaningful feedback. Administrator support was also described as vital in helping to resolve conflicts with co-teachers and parents, as well as in thinking about creatively providing access to education for students. Participant 13 (Special Education), along with three other participants, discussed the support provided by administrators. Participant 13 (Special Education) stated:

> When I moved to the middle school, that principal and then the successive principal, have been incredibly supportive of inclusion and of making sure that if I have an idea and I say, I think we can do this and this is how, and if I give them

> a plan, they're okay, go for it. And they don't mind if it fails, which, you know what I mean? I think if I had an administrator who said, "Well, you can try it and then it failed," and I'm "Eh, we got to go back." And they said, "No, you can't do this or we're not you've got to know ahead of time," I don't think that's really supportive.

Financial support was also cited as one of the most important ways that administrators can facilitate inclusion by three participants. Participant 16 (Special Education) described her administrator as being "the money person," along with Participant 9 (Special Education). Participant 9 (Special Education) stated:

> If I need money for anything, she's the person I go to. If we, we bought a bunch of adaptive PE equipment so= scooter boards, parachutes, things like that. And we have a rule that if you- we'll bring out all of our equipment during our recess time and kids can play with it. Any kid can play with it, but you also have to, you have to play with a room 5 kid. So that's cool. And I had to go through my principal to make sure we had money in our funding for that. But she's, she's the money lady…

Participant 4 (Special Education) discussed having a very active administrator, who was able to be a financial resource and make sure students had adequate supplies:

> One time we were struggling, a student didn't have enough materials and by the time I had my meeting with them a week later, he's like "Oh, I thought you didn't have this stuff. I already ordered more for you." So this school is really amazing about giving us assistance and help and advice and they don't do it in a demeaning way.

Administrative Mission and Vision. Another role of the school administrator is to facilitate and steward a mission and vision for inclusive education, and monitor it's progress. There were ten participants who described how their administrator influences inclusive education with a mission and vision and monitoring the program. Participant 7 (Special Education) discussed her experience with supporting a mindset change towards inclusion :

> We had to have a major mind shift and cultural expectation that we needed to change regarding students with disabilities. And we had to start with our building

> administration, because they really are the ones that lead the way and lead the charge and making sure that your teachers are on board and buy-in, especially when you're needing to do a major cultural shift like we did. So we really focused on our administrators the very first year and getting their buy-in and getting them to understand the importance and the positive impacts behind inclusive teaching. And so we spent the entire first year focusing solely on our building administration because without them, you can't do anything else successfully.

When administrators did not steward a mission and vision with inclusion as a focus, participants reported administrators as barriers. Participant 16 (Special Education) described this shift in thinking by discussing how the vision of her principal changed the school environment:

> Unfortunately last year our principal took away many of the inclusive positions and moved those back to self-contained so I think the role could go both ways. The role of my administrator 3 years ago was to steward that vision of inclusion and encourage acceptance of all students and giving all students what they need. Last year my administrators shepherded a different vision that was more exclusive.

While moving the school towards an inclusive mission and vision was important, participants also discussed monitoring as an important role of the administrator. Participant 8 (Special Education) described her administrator's monitoring role:

> So the administrator role is to make sure that these, the IEP is being followed and also make sure that the progress reports are being sent out, making sure that the teachers are getting with the parents if they have a problem or if there is success and basically making sure that the transition is just smooth for not only the teachers that are involved but also for the students and for the learning environment and making sure that their accommodations are there. Also, when I think about the standards of learning, which we use in Virginia, making sure that those are followed because if a student is taking an SOL and he needs more time, if he needs an accommodation as far as an audio or whatever, the administrator is definitely responsible for that. Also, the administrator is responsible for keeping the teachers apprised to say, for example, any new medication, anything that's going on in the home that may be inhibiting that student to perform it at his or her best.

Scheduling. Participants also cited creating a master schedule that provided sufficient and common planning time as an important facilitator of inclusion. Participant 10 (General Education) summarized her thoughts around this, stating:

> I guess the biggest facilitator is building a master schedule. That's the biggest thing that they have control over. So building a master schedule where special ed staff and general ed staff have planning together is huge. Building a schedule where you have to look at strengths of your teachers and know who is best suited for whichever thing. There've been times we've had principals who said, "Oh, everybody should teach a co-taught class and everybody should teach an advanced class" and it's a disaster because that's not, no one is ever great at everything. So probably the scheduling is the biggest thing.

Building the master schedule entails considering a variety of factors, including both student and staff placement. Participant 16 (Special Education) addressed this by discussing the importance of groupings, stating that the principal "also had to be very conscientious about groupings and who was being placed where so that the inclusion program could be successful." This was amplified in Participant 11's (Special Education) experience with her administrator addressing paraprofessional burnout:

> Burnout was huge for paraprofessionals. So we had our paras working half day with one kid, half day with another kid and we tried to do it where one of the children was less than- had less involved needs than the other. And 'cause we, we found that you could retain staff better if you weren't with a child all day, let alone multiple years. And so she was super helpful in being able to take her systems and span them across the three schools.

For one participant (Participant 13, Special Education) the administrator worked to schedule additional time to complete required paperwork, which was seen as a huge benefit in facilitating inclusion:

> I also will say that, our principal gives us two days, a year- one day a year to write IEPs. He buys a substitute for us and we get to have a day to write IEPs and he gives us a day to put together our VAAP folders before they're due and make sure we've got all the signatures and everything. I know it comes out of school money. It doesn't, the sub isn't paid for by the district and that is amazing, that level of support.

Training. Participants also discussed their administrator as being the person to plan training around inclusive practices. Participant 14 (Special Education) described her administrator's role as being important in that he facilitated all training on inclusive practices, something she felt was vital to general education staff members.

Despite the administrator helping to support and facilitate inclusion in some schools, other participants revealed that their administrator had no engagement with them or their students. There were two participants (Participant 3, Special Education and Participant 12, General Education) who, when asked about the role of their administrator in inclusion, responded by saying, "He signs the IEP." Participant 12 (General Education) extended on this by saying, "If I go to them it's because I could not find the answer with the case manager, the parents or the lead teacher for student services. And to be honest, my admin team is not very helpful with that."

This suggests that participants still experience administrators as a barrier to inclusion because they have limited or no engagement with the teachers or with students who have complex support needs. Participant 13 (Special Education) indicated that:

> When I first started in the elementary school, his role was to- he took no more than two steps into my doorway. So he said either good morning or good afternoon and waved to the kids and left. If I had a behavior problem, you're good. You know how to do this. If there were parent issues, again you've got this, he really was terrified of my children and their parents.

Paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals were discussed as important in the inclusive environment, but also described as a barrier that sometimes made it difficult for students to be successful in the inclusive environment. Participant 11 (Special Education) discussed this when speaking about some of the difficulties her students experienced:

> You do rely on your paraprofessionals, so your paraprofessionals that can be good hearted, but they're not teachers, so they don't have the entire toolkit, nor do they have the gumption to ask the kid to move. "Hey, you're in, you're in Jimmy's seat, can you go back to where you usually sit or find a new seat because he can't see from the back" or something. You know, I used to tell the staff to make something up. You're the adult, he cannot be in the back of the room.

Families. While families and parents were not considered in this study, it is important to note that seven participants discussed parents as barriers to success in the inclusive environment. It is important to mention that staff members discussed parents as a "surprising barrier" (Participant 7, Special Education) to inclusion and noted that they were not as responsive to attempts at moving students to a more inclusive setting. All of the participants who discussed parents as a barrier to inclusive education discussed their experiences with parents who refused to or were unable to support their student in becoming successful in an inclusive educational environment.

Students. When considering barriers to inclusion, seven participants cited student-related factors as barriers to inclusion, including student needs and behaviors. Students with complex support needs who had significant behaviors were occasionally unable to participate in the inclusive setting because of safety issues, such as elopement outside of the school building, as mentioned by Participant 9 (Special Education). Participant 10 (General Education) discussed safety concerns as a result of behaviors as being a significant barrier, citing one of her fifteen year-old students who tried to assault a school staff member with a deadly weapon and was removed from the school setting.

In addition to behaviors causing concern for safety, sensory behaviors were also cited as barriers to inclusion because of the teacher's difficulty in ignoring them. Participant 6 (Special Education) discussed her experiences with trying to help teachers support her student with significant behaviors:

> I was in with a student with autism. The teacher had really never taught in a class with significant needs before… and she had a hard time teaching while I was also teaching. and then she also had a hard time with the student with autism. He did some flapping. He would make noises sometimes. He would get up and try to wander around sometimes, which is where the timer and the, if, then came in. But she just had a really hard time focusing and thoughtfully accepting the students into the class because of the behaviors and it took a lot of discussions and coming up with resources to make it work.

Other student behaviors that impacted their success in the inclusive environment included work refusal and refusal to use accommodations. In instances of work refusal, Participant 5 (Special Education) noted that students often had social emotional needs that dictated their responses, which were amplified because of their complex support needs. Participant 1 (General Education), also discussed her experience with student behaviors inhibiting a successful inclusive experience when her student refused accommodations and was unable to be successful in her classroom without them, stating, "I have a kid who refuses to use his audio accommodation and we're like if you're not going to use it, it's going to be taken away. And his mom, she wants us to, she can't seem to understand that I can hook all this stuff up for him, but I can't make him listen. I can drown his little head in the water, but I can't make him drink it…" Some students have also developed the behavior of learned helplessness, which makes them think that they are unable to do things on their own and may hinder their independence.

While student needs were cited as barriers, eight participants discussed relationships with students as being facilitators of inclusion. Participant 1 (General Education) summarized her thoughts on the importance of relationships, stating:

> I think that right as a teacher knowing what you got to know your kids. And so if you don't know your kids then you're not going to know what's gonna work. So I mean, a lot of that first, a couple of weeks of school is getting to know them and what they can do. And I think that's where you do a lot of that data to kind of figure out, okay, this is the kind of stuff that's going to work in this class. This is

> the kind of stuff that is not going to work in this class. Because honestly if you think about it, how much is your admin really that involved in your classroom? It's you as the classroom teacher that are really in there. And so if you really want a successful classroom, I think that the real facilitator that is going to come down to the gen ed and your co-your special ed teacher.

These relationships are vital for when teachers and students experience conflict, as mentioned by Participant 1 (General Education) when discussing why she places so much emphasis relationships with students:

> I've definitely had instances where I blew up at a kid, got angry at them or they just made so many poor decisions. So I have apologized to students. We've talked about maybe the day after, "Okay, I didn't necessarily have the right response there. What do you think you could have done better? This is what I think I could have done better. What can we do for the future? So I got upset with you because you did this, this and this. This is where I think we could have stopped it. Do you think in the future if you, this starts to happen, you could say, Hey, Ms. I need to go take a walk. I need to go to the bathroom, I need to get water. Something like that. I'm happy to do that." Sometimes when you're a teacher, you reach your point too. And that's what I try. It's like we're, I'm human too. I'm at my point. And I think sometimes apologizing to a student and admitting that I also chose poorly.

Participant 12 (General Education) summarized her thoughts on the importance of developing relationships with students by saying:

> What has been the biggest for me is building that relationship with that kid, getting them to trust the process and then showing how it works. And it sounds, it sounds lower level and it sounds frivolous, but I don't really, I don't see any, I haven't seen any other way to have it done.

Pedagogical Factors

Participants cited pedagogical factors as being an important subtheme relating to meaningful inclusion. Pedagogical factors were those factors relating to the implementation of the school programs and the curriculum itself. Participants discussed pedagogical factors as being both facilitators and barriers depending on how they were presented in the classroom settings. Topics in the pedagogical factors subtheme included training, scheduling, curriculum, classroom management, and specific programs.

Training. Participants indicated that training served as a significant factor in determining the success of inclusion and the inclusive education program. Participant 3 (Special Education) discussed training for both special education and general education teachers as being important in facilitating successful inclusion and indicated that it was most important that participants had opportunities to "learn more about it." Participant 1 (General Education) also discussed training, focusing her emphasis on training for new teachers. She stated, "It's important to provide that training and support for new teachers who get thrown in and get the CoLab from heck and get the well who thought that these kids should all be in the same room together? You know, those kinds of things."

Paraprofessional training was cited as a barrier for two participants and had an impact on the success of students in the inclusive environment. Participant 13 (Special Education) discussed this in the context of her students, saying, "And I kept saying, the paras are there, they can read them. And I said, and if you click on that little button, most of the time it reads it to them. They, it's mostly, they don't remember to do those things."

This idea was discussed in more detail by Participant 11 (Special Education), who stated:

> You do rely on your paraprofessionals. So your paraprofessionals, they can be good hearted but they're not teachers, so they don't have the entire toolkit. They need more training. Nor or do they have the gumption to ask the kid to move. "Hey, you're in, you're in Jimmy's seat. Can you go back to where you usually sit or find a new seat because he can't see from the back or something." I used to tell the staff to make something up. You're the adult, he cannot be in the back of the room.

Scheduling. Scheduling was described as a consideration that can facilitate a successful inclusive experience or become a barrier to successful inclusion. Having a master schedule that accommodates the needs of students and teachers while allowing for collaboration and co-planning was described by fourteen participants as being important

in facilitating inclusion. Participant 10 (General Education) summarized the importance of the schedule, stating:

> You just have to go back to the schedule if it works. It's because people thought through, they thought enough about what certain kids need at certain times and with certain people and staff and everything. And so a schedule that works would is really helpful.

Another important consideration described by participants was the departmentalization of programs. For Participant 6 (Special Education), departmentalization helped to support inclusive practices:

> Our district tries to departmentalize us so that we can get really good at working with a group of teachers and content. When I first moved to the county, I was in science, I was in math, I was in English, I was everywhere, and I was trying to learn new material and teach new material and work with them, all the teachers in the school. And that was difficult. But once they departmentalized us, now I teach history and English and I'm able to learn history and learn English and teach it well. I'm not trying to learn every subject within the school. And that helped a lot.

On the opposite end of the spectrum a non-departmentalized program created barriers for the special education teacher who was required to modify the curriculum and provide accommodations to the students. In some instances, special education teachers had a relatively small caseload but served multiple grade levels. Participant 7 (Special Education) described the schedule for one of her co-teachers:

> One of our special education teachers covers our students in kindergarten through third grade. So she has 13 students on her caseload, which is a very small caseload size. But she's spread across three grade levels and eight different teachers. So really, master scheduling is a bear. It's usually our monster and the thing that tends to get in our way when we're working with, with trying to expand those collaborative opportunities. Because even if we split her among those we're looking at an hour and a half to two hours per day per classroom and there's just not a way to kind of spread someone that thin without cloning, without that staffing model.

While the schedule for staff members was described as important, the student schedules were also described as important to consider in the journey towards inclusion.

There were eight participants who discussed class sizes and student groupings as both a facilitator and barrier to inclusion. In Participant 6's (Special Education) experience, the student groupings caused difficulty in completing her job:

> Having upwards of 10 students with disabilities in one class makes it really hard. And sometimes I will have seven students who are very high functioning but still need modifications and specialized instruction. And then I have one or two students with complex needs and I'm trying to meet all of those within one classroom. And it's very difficult.

Curriculum. The curriculum required for students to complete during their time in the inclusive setting was described, largely as a limiting factor, by participants. Participant 14 (Special Education) described her perspective on the curriculum as a barrier:

> For example, text. And when they're in lower grades, that doesn't become as much of an issue. It doesn't become as evident because they're not being asked to see certain things in the text. When they get somewhere around third grade, maybe even second grade, it becomes a real issue that they can't access certain parts of the curriculum and reading is where you see it the most when they're being asked to see beyond the text or, or inference or, character traits, or see what character's thoughts and feelings are. You really see that, but it also can be in other areas too. So because reading is just so essential in all parts of the curriculum, sometimes you see it in history or, sometimes even even math, sometimes it's not the reading aspect, but they are so black and white, so it's hard for them to see things that might be vague. So the curriculum itself can, can be a barrier.

Math curriculum was also described as a barrier by Participant 4 (Special Education):

> A teacher with ninth grade algebra I students teaching it as if everybody's going to pre-calculus and they're not. So they're talking way above their level. They're talking, they're using words that they're never going to have to know. I was talking to a teacher one time, we were doing remediation over the summer and he did geometry and the kids were lost because he's using theta for the angle and all this kind of stuff. And I said, "Just put an X in there. They'll understand what that means…"So I think one barrier is being able to separate it and say, this group of kids needs the lower level, the bare basics of the content, the simplest explanations; while this other group can have the more complicated explanations. They can have, the, this is what's going to happen later in your math career kind of stuff. To me that's a huge barrier. Just being able to put stuff into kids' level

> and figuring out that they aren't all- you know you can't teach 25 kids exactly the same way and expect all 25 to understand it.

Testing was also described as a barrier, as Virginia utilizes the Standards of Learning Assessments (SOLs). This alternate curriculum, which is utilized for students with severe disabilities, was also noted as a barrier. Participant 9 (Special Education) stated:

> They do a separate math program for kindergarten, first, second grade, all the way up for general education. And then for the special day classes they'll do a specific curriculum for kindergarten through second as a grade band. And then I fall into this weird middle ground where I'm like okay, that's great. It makes my life a little bit easier to just plan for my class. But if my students are going to be included academically with their grade level peers, then I have to choose if I'm going to plan three different grade levels and then have it modified so that they can be included with their, their peers or if I'm going to do the parts that they want me to do but then I would have to recreate things again if I wanted my second grade kid to go to second grade math with his peers, things like that. I would say that. So the logistical planning part is always a hang-up for me for the academic part. That's hard.

Classroom Management. Classroom management was described by Participant 1 (General Education) as being an important factor in her practice of inclusion. She stated, “classroom management is the key and I think that's one of the reasons that I've been more successful than some other teachers and kids want structure. They don't act like they do, but they do, they want structure.”

Specific Programs. One participant described a specific program as beneficial to the journey to inclusion for her students. Participant 9 (Special Education) described the Special Olympics as facilitating inclusion for her early elementary school students:

> My favorite resource is Special Olympics. The school partnership program is awesome and the leadership group of the Northern California branch where I am, they happen to be the same folks that I've worked with since my first year of teaching even when I've moved schools to now. So it's nice. I have the same contact so I can call. Those folks will even come out to our schools and run little field days where it's just totally inclusive sports for kids that are typically developing kids have disabilities. So that's my favorite because it's free and they

> come with people and equipment and that's wonderful. What we usually need are just more people to run stuff. So that's a fantastic resource.

Physical Factors

Participants cited physical factors as being an important subtheme in factors that promote inclusion, noting that it was vital in providing their students with access to the school or their learning. Physical factors are factors relating to physical pieces of the school, such as physical access or materials. Topics within this subtheme included the physical classroom and school environment and funding or financial resources for specific physical materials and equipment.

Physical Environment. The physical environment of the school and classroom is an important component in the inclusive environment, and an accessible physical environment can be used to provide equitable access for all members of the school community. Participant 13 (Special Education) discussed the physical environment of her school and how it impacted access for her students:

> Until this year we had no elevator in our building and so our school was all on one level. And then the gym is sunken. So in order to get to the gym, our kids with mobility issues had to go outside, go down a ramp, then go down another ramp and come around and go in the ground level doors by the, by the locker rooms. Which doesn't sound too bad except for the fact that we live in Virginia and it's cold in the winter and it snows, and it rains a lot. So there were days that our kids didn't, just didn't go to PE because the weather, they couldn't get there. I love the elevator.

Participant 3 (Special Education) shared similar concerns regarding physical access for her students:

> Older school buildings are an issue… our bathrooms aren't handicapped accessible. The elevator mobility is not reliable. Various other schools are on separate levels and it's just very, very difficult. I see that as a barrier for inclusion. And they have a door at the back. So I think that is, just the physical buildings in the, the lack of infrastructure as a barrier.

For other students, the physical environment became a barrier when they were placed in an area of the classroom that did not allow them to be meaningfully included. Participant 3 (Special Education) summarized these physical barriers as "looking more than anything like isolation in the classroom. You know, they'll put them somewhere different, or where they will ignore their questions, things like that, that, those are things I've seen."

Funding and Resources

There were six participants who cited finances and funding as barriers to meaningful inclusion for their students. Participants indicated that a lack of available funding made it difficult for them to be able to provide their students with a meaningful inclusive experience because they could not always get the funds to purchase the needed materials. Participant 16 (Special Education) described her thoughts on the importance of funding:

> People and money and scheduling. You have to be willing to put forward the money to provide support for students with complex support needs if you want them to be successful. Sometimes this might mean adding an additional paraprofessional or something like that but it could also mean buying supplies like alternative seating or sensory materials.

Summary

This chapter examined the perceptions and understanding of sixteen general education and special education teachers of students with complex support needs around inclusive education, as well as emergent themes around how these school staff members make meaning of the inclusive education environment. Central themes clustered around strategies for inclusion, program outcomes, relational factors, pedagogical factors, physical factors. Overall, participants noted similar views on the facilitators and barriers

of inclusion, however special education teachers noted a greater depth and breadth of strategies to support inclusion. In summary, results from the data analysis suggest

- the necessity of a large and diverse toolbox of strategies to support inclusive education for all students;
- the need for participants to see concrete progress for their students in areas including both academic skills and social engagement;
- the importance of people and human resources to support the inclusive mission;
- the role of the administrator in supporting the inclusive environment; and
- the necessity of increased training opportunities for staff members working in inclusive settings.

This data shows insight into the understanding of the inclusive education experience for teachers supporting students with complex support needs, as well as an understanding of the barriers and facilitators of inclusion for students with such needs. The following chapter intends to further these concepts by applying an analysis to the responses of participants. This allows for the development of conclusions and future recommendations in an attempt to further understand how teachers provide students with complex support needs with access to an inclusive educational experience.

CHAPTER V: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Research on the best tools and strategies for supporting students with complex support needs in the general education setting is limited, and there is not a significant understanding of how teachers understand and make meaning of the inclusive education

experiences of their students. This study investigated the experiences of teachers of the inclusion of students with complex support needs in the areas of behavior, cognitive needs, or physical/medical needs. Teachers were asked about the overall experiences of students with complex support needs in the inclusive classroom setting, as well as their understanding of the inclusive education experience. This study aimed to develop a better understanding of the perceptions and efforts of teachers around inclusive education as well as provide insight into contributing factors of social-emotional and academic success in the inclusive setting.

Interpretations and Conclusions

Research question 1 and 3 are addressed by discussing the results focused around general education and special education teachers (a) need for strategies to support inclusion and (b) planning and monitoring for program outcomes. Findings emphasize the importance of utilizing both evidence-based and teacher developed strategies to support inclusion. Findings also highlighted the importance of monitoring a variety of factors to make meaning of inclusion for students with complex support needs.

Finding 1: Inclusion can Work for Students with Complex Support Needs

A finding that was heavily discussed by both general education and special education teachers was the belief that inclusion can work for their students with complex support needs including physical or health needs, cognitive needs, or behavior needs, when they have the strategies and resources that they need to promote inclusion. Students with these types of disabilities can be successful in the inclusive setting, as long as the proper supports are provided. When teachers were taught and were able to utilize strategies that could support their students, they saw their students experience success in

the inclusive environment. The sections below provide further interpretations and conclusions relating to the finding that inclusion can work for students with complex support needs.

Strategies for Inclusion

Participants discussed utilizing a variety of strategies to support students with complex support needs in the general education classroom, and these strategies were described by teachers as being strategies that can benefit both special education and general education students. When participants were provided with strategies to support the inclusion of their students, they saw that their students were successful in the inclusive environment.

Participants described using a combination of co-teaching methods and UDL principles, sometimes with technology as a medium, when working to support their students in the inclusive setting. This allowed students to learn at multiple access points through differentiated and modified materials as well as to show their learning in a variety of ways. In addition, participants discussed teaching their students using memory aids and repetition so that they could remember information taught as well as through exposing them to material before the lesson through preteaching.

Other strategies are discussed within finding 3 later in this study, however it is important to note that strategies were described by participants as being an important factor in their ability to support student success in the inclusive setting. This should be considered by school programs attempting to implement an effective inclusive program because the teachers and staff members will need to have strategies to support inclusion available to them.

Behavior Management. While teachers discussed these classroom strategies as being important, they also described student behaviors in detail and discussed effective behavior management strategies as being important in the success of students with complex support needs. There were thirteen teachers who discussed working with students who had significant behaviors in the classroom, and included both general education and special education teachers. This finding, that teachers had to understand behavior in order to manage it, was highlighted by the way that teachers who described being able to support their students who had significant behaviors in the inclusive setting were able to richly describe student behaviors in way that demonstrated understanding of the behavior, which then helped them to manage the behaviors. Teachers described supporting students with aggressive behaviors as well as hyperactive or inattentive behaviors, and indicated that their students benefited from the use of strategies such as deescalation, building rapport, and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS).

While two teachers discussed using deescalation strategies as a means of managing student behaviors when the student was already in crisis, eight special education participants described positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) as being vital in the implementation of successful inclusion strategies. Teachers discussed a variety of strategies at the tier III or individual student level as supporting students in being successful in the general education classroom setting. Each of these individual plans utilized student interests or motivational tools and provided the student with access to that interest or tool at intervals based on their individual reinforcement plan, which helped to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative student behaviors. This finding is supported by previous research indicating that PBIS can help to lessen

problematic behaviors and support students in developing positive and expected behaviors (Neitzel, 2012), which can help to support their success in the inclusive setting.

Social Engagement

Participants also discussed social engagement as being an important consideration in deciding the success of the inclusive program. Special education teachers described seeing their students invited to birthday parties and other outside events as being an indicator of true social inclusion, with their students being true members of the school community when they were invited to parties and given valentine cards on holidays. Unstructured times were also found to be an informal indicator of success for participants. Recess was an important time of day for opportunities for inclusion, and participants described modeling appropriate behaviors and then watching other students continue with the same behaviors to include peers with disabilities. For one participant, she noted that peers played games in modified ways to include their peers with disabilities meaningfully after seeing them demonstrated by the teacher.

Structured school times also provided opportunities for social engagement during group activities or large group social times. Participants described students working collaboratively on tasks such as an online question and answer platform to review content as well as students supporting the participation of their peers with disabilities by advocating with them in conversations with adults. Over time, participants noted increases in social engagement for their students with complex support needs that helped to indicate their success in the inclusive setting.

Program Monitoring

In order to support a successful inclusive education program, participants discussed the importance of monitoring the inclusive program to make modifications and adjustments to shepherd program success. When asked to describe how they measure the success of the inclusive program, participants discussed engaging in a variety of actions to support inclusion including understanding students and monitoring student progress, and following and monitoring IEPs.

In the field of special education, data is considered to be vital in any decision-making process. Both general education and special education participants described student progress as continuing to be of vital importance in the inclusive education journey. Participants described reviewing student growth data, as well as IEP goal progress, in making adjustments to their inclusive education program. Data on student behaviors was also considered to be important, with participants describing a decrease shown in behavior data as an indicator of success in the program. Observations were also vital and allowed participants to sit in as an observer instead of an active participant, providing the opportunity to note any concerns or things that needed to be changed. Both special education and general education participants emphasized the concept of growth as opposed to looking for students to earn a perfect grade to show their progress. This is an interesting finding because it seems to indicate an emphasis on individual student growth as opposed to ensuring all students get a perfect score.

Finding 2: For Inclusion to Work, Systems Have to Support it

A second major finding across participants in general education and special education was the importance of having a system that helps to make inclusion work. Systems should consider the importance of a robust transition planning program in their

inclusive journey, as well as the need for school systems to promote a student-focused environment of collaboration and communication.

Transition planning was discussed by one special education teacher participant, who described the need for her students to be transitioned to high school in a more effective manner that allows them to become accustomed to the classroom environment at the high school level before being in the high school environment full-time. This finding is interesting because only one teacher discussed planning for transitions, such as those from middle to high school, which would seem to be important in monitoring the success of the inclusive program.

In order to create a successful inclusive program, schools must consider transition planning as a vital component of student success. Changes to the current system should consider a robust transition planning system that supports students in transitions between elementary and middle school, middle and high school, and high school to postsecondary placements. This will support students in being better prepared to be members of the inclusive community and could influence their success in the inclusive setting.

Overall communication among members of a student's school team was cited as an important facilitator of effective inclusive education by both general education and special education teachers. Communication with other teachers was used as a means of problem-solving around individual student difficulties as well as to plan for anticipated student needs for special education and general education teachers. When members of the team, including the parents or family, do not participate in active communication, communication can become a significant barrier that does not support a successful inclusive experience.

General education and special education participants also described the importance of collaborating in the communication process. This was cited as an important facilitator by twelve participants because of the collaboration process and the way it creates a feeling of shared responsibility for student success. When staff members have feelings of shared responsibility, they are able to work together towards the common goal of ensuring their students are successful and that they have the tools they need to access their learning. This collaboration also allows for troubleshooting and problem-solving through shared ideas. These findings support the need for teachers and school staff members serving students to be given opportunities to work together and collaborate in a meaningful way to provide the most accessible education to their students. This is not common according to participants in this study, so systems should consider making changes that encourage and provide time for staff to communicate and collaborate with each other.

Finding 3: Modify the Conceptual Framework

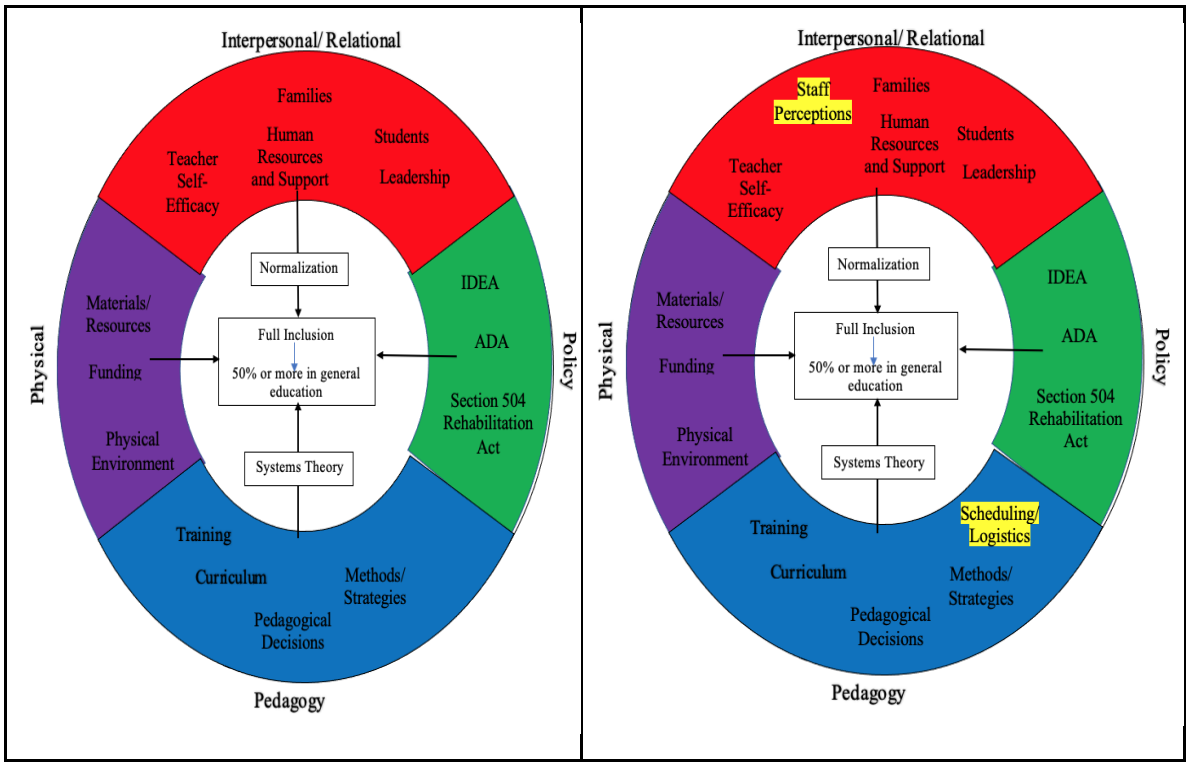
The third finding of this study largely supported the conceptual framework, however there were some additions revealed based on the results of this study. While there were many variables considered in the conceptual framework, this study specifically focused on four school-based factors grounded in the literature (See Figure 1) that are needed to support inclusion of students with disabilities that include: policy implementation, interpersonal/relational factors, physical requirements, and pedagogy.

Through a review of the results of this study as well as a review of the literature, the third finding of keeping the current conceptual framework with some modifications is supported. The revised conceptual framework is shown below in Figure 4 with the

following changes: adding staff perceptions to the interpersonal factors section and adding scheduling and logistical concerns to the pedagogical factors. Within this conceptual framework, the most important considerations, as discussed by participants, were staff perceptions, the physical environment, methods and strategies, training, and scheduling and logistics. These were most often cited as facilitators and barriers of successful inclusion for students with complex support needs, and noted by participants as important factors in the success of the inclusive environment.

Figure 4

Revised Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Education (Initial framework on left, updated framework on right)



In order to support a truly inclusive environment, school staff members need to have positive views and perceptions of their students with complex support needs and be able to presume competence of their students. In addition, the school environments need to better support inclusive opportunities by being physically accessible to students with ramps, elevators, and doorways wide enough to accommodate any equipment. The inclusive environment is most successful when there is a schedule that provides adequate support as well.

Perhaps the most important level of change is the need for training and methods of strategies to be available to staff members working with students with complex support needs. Staff members need to understand how to best support their students with disabilities so that they can serve them. Perhaps the most effective way to begin to address this need is through both targeted training and system-wide training. Targeted training can focus on providing staff members working with individual students with the supports and strategies that they need to work with that individual student or students, and can ensure that staff members truly understand the unique needs of the students they serve. Before engaging in targeted training, however, school systems can start with system-wide training focusing on understanding disability culture and building disability awareness. This training can focus on presuming competence of all students and recognizing their unique values and potentials.

Policy Implementation

While this study did not explicitly address policy and its influence on access to inclusive education, participants did discuss the importance of following the student's IEP and ensuring that students receive access to their least restrictive environment. In

addition, IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 contribute to the ability and legal precedent for students with disabilities to be included and provided with access to the general education curriculum and classroom with their peers (Taylor, 2011).

Interpersonal and Relational Factors

Interpersonal and relational factors included in this conceptual framework include teacher self-efficacy, educational leadership, families, students, human resources, and support. Staff perceptions were added to this section as an important consideration in the inclusive educational program.

Staff Perceptions. Participants described perceptions of their students as an important factor in the success of inclusive education. This factor should be added to the interpersonal factors of the conceptual framework due to the number of times it was cited by participants as influencing outcomes. When described as a barrier, people were most often a barrier due to having a limited number or due to negative attitudes towards students with disabilities.

Staff perceptions were discussed by participants as being a barrier for the effective inclusion of their students. There were no participants who discussed staff perceptions as a facilitator for successful inclusion. This seems to indicate that the perceptions of those who are working in the school and classroom influence the experiences of students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting. Participants described experiencing teachers who did not want to have students with any special education needs in their classrooms as well as teachers who felt that it would be too much work to have students with complex support needs in their classrooms. The idea that students with complex support needs are a burden even led to

teachers engaging negatively with students on some occasions or refusing to provide them with the accommodations that they need to be successful. This finding was common among special education teachers but was not discussed by general education teachers, which may indicate that special education teachers encountered negative perceptions more frequently than general education teachers.

Self-efficacy. Self- efficacy considers teachers' feelings confidence and is likely that their practices and quality of instruction will reflect such feelings and may help to make inclusion more successful (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). Throughout this study, teachers discussed the strategies they used to support their students and their increases in confidence and ability to support their students. Despite this, teachers described receiving limited training for how to properly provide their students with an inclusive education and having to engage in a significant amount of "on the job" training.

Administrators. Educational leadership was another important consideration in the effectiveness of the inclusive educational program. It is vital in the success of an inclusive school, and school leaders must also promote a culture of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). This study supported the finding that administrators are an important factor in the inclusive educational setting. Both general education and special education participants described administrators as being integral in implementing inclusive educational practices because of their role in supporting teachers, stewarding a mission and vision, creating a schedule, and providing training for school staff members. They were described as both facilitators and barriers based on their actions and attitudes towards inclusive education.

When supporting teachers, administrators were able to listen to teachers and help them think about and process their struggles and difficulties, sometimes intervening with other school staff members to support the inclusive mission. Other participants discussed administrator support as being a part of the conflict resolution process by acting as a mediator when conflicts arose among staff members or with parents. In the experiences of other participants, administrators were part of the planning process and helped to recommend new and innovative ideas for teachers to use when supporting students with complex support needs. This also included providing financial support to teachers so that necessary supplies could be purchased.

Participants also discussed stewarding a mission and vision as a vital part of the administrator's role in inclusive education. Administrators were described as influencing the inclusive education environment through their stewardship of the inclusive education mission and vision as well as their monitoring of the program. Administrators were cited as the people who facilitated the mind and culture shift that is required for inclusive education to be successful. When administrators stewarded a vision of exclusion, participants noted that this made it difficult for their students to be successful in the inclusive setting. In addition to sharing this mission and vision, administrators were also required to engage in monitoring of the program by ensuring that student IEPs were followed and that the program was functioning properly. This finding seems to indicate that the administrator's view of and support of the inclusive mission impacts the perception of inclusion for the rest of the school.

Part of ensuring the functioning of the program was creating a master schedule that provided adequate staffing and support for students with disabilities, as well as

common planning and collaboration time. When master schedules provided for common planning and collaboration time, as well as adequate staffing, participants cited the schedule as an important facilitator of inclusion.

The final means of facilitating inclusive education as an administrator was in ensuring participants received appropriate training. Administrators were described as the people who planned and scheduled all trainings, and when they ensured there were trainings around inclusive education the program seemed to be more successful. These trainings should focus on removing the stigma of special education from one that views students as being unable to participate in their education to one that presumes competence and sees them as people who can be actively engaged and successful in their education.

Still, three participants cited their administrators as barriers because they had limited or no involvement in the inclusive education program or environment. This suggests that the administrator as a facilitator or barrier for inclusion is determined at the individual school level based on unique factors attributable to the administrator.

Families and Students. While this conceptual framework acknowledges that families also likely play a role in whether or not their children are included in the general education classroom, this scope of this study did not include parents or families in order to limit its scope. Due to the support from the literature, this factor should remain a part of this conceptual framework.

Students also factor into the success of an inclusive school program, however a significant gap exists in research focusing on student opinions about their inclusive experiences, as there is limited research focusing on this topic. Student needs and

behaviors were cited as primary barriers to successful inclusion by both special education and general education teacher participants, with some participants stating that students could not meaningfully participate in the inclusive setting because their behaviors posed a safety concern for themselves or others.

Students with complex support needs engaged in frequent work refusal or refused to use their accommodations, which made it difficult for them to access their learning and negatively impacted their educational experience. For some participants, the teacher's response to student behaviors was also a barrier to successful inclusion. Some participants discussed teachers who could not ignore sensory behaviors such as flapping or humming.

While student behaviors were often cited as a barrier to inclusion, participants described developing relationships with students as facilitators to a successful inclusive learning experience and discussed their use of individualized strategies to manage student behaviors. These individualized strategies were described by participants as decreasing student behaviors and helping to facilitate students being able to be included with their peers. Due to the participant responses and support from the literature, student-related factors continue to be a significant part of this conceptual framework.

Human Resources or Support. Another interpersonal factor in the inclusion of students with complex support needs is people or human resources and support. This included the availability of people to provide support to students.

When considering the support of additional people, special education participants and one general education participant described paraprofessionals as being both facilitators and barriers to the inclusive education program. Paraprofessionals were often

taking the place of the teacher, and sometimes they did not have the training or the skills to support students. This finding is supported by research that indicates that paraprofessionals require training and significant support, as well as follow-up on previous training, to be successful in supporting students (Giangreco & Hoza, 2013).

When considering the special education teacher, half of participants described the case manager or special education teacher as the most effective facilitator of inclusion. This is because that person is seen as a strong advocate for the student as well as someone who has rapport and understands the student's needs. This sentiment was echoed by all participants who described the case manager or special education teacher as the biggest facilitator, and suggests that advocacy from the teacher is perceived as one of the factors that makes inclusion more effective for students.

Physical Requirements

Based on student and teacher accounts, it is clear that the physical spaces of the classroom and school may hinder the ability of students to access their school community (Stanton- Chaman & Schmidt, 2016; Pivik, et al., 2002). Schools that create a physical environment that promotes access for all students, regardless of disability, seem likely to help promote inclusive practices and inclusion itself.

Funding and Resources. This factor has been changed from materials and equipment in order to better encompass the results of this study. Participants cited the importance of having funding which in turn allowed them to have additional resources. Funding and resources were physical factors that both general education and special education participants cited as barriers to meaningful inclusion. Participants reported having difficulties in getting the money or funding to purchase materials and resources

needed for their students, which in turn made it difficult to create a meaningful inclusive education experience. Teachers described using physical tools, especially when teaching math concepts, in order to provide a concrete representation of math concepts that students were able to understand and see in front of them. This finding seems to indicate that funding and resources are an important factor in the success of inclusive education and that their presence can help to facilitate successful inclusion.

Physical Environment. The physical classroom and school building were cited by special education participants as being barriers to the successful inclusion of their students, simply because they were not accessible to students with physical disabilities who required elevators and other accessible accommodations. Some students were unable to get to certain classes because they were down a set of stairs and there was no elevator or safe way to access the class. Still other students were excluded from field trips because they required an accessible bus that allowed them to be safely transported in their wheelchairs. This finding is important because students with physical access needs may not have access to the inclusive environment if it has physical barriers.

On occasion, the location of the student in the classroom was noted as a barrier, with some students who have complex support needs being seated at the back of the classroom, which caused them to be unintentionally excluded from the rest of the class. Essentially, teachers described students as being isolated in the classroom because of their location in the classroom. This finding is important because simply being in the classroom did not seem to be a factor that influences success in the inclusive setting, as the student's ability to participate in the classroom from their location within it was more important to participants.

Pedagogy

Another important consideration in this conceptual framework was pedagogy. The factors considered in this section of the conceptual framework included training, curriculum, pedagogy, and methods or strategies. Based on findings from this study, an additional factor of scheduling and logistical concerns was added to the conceptual framework.

Scheduling and Logistical Concerns. While not considered in the original conceptual framework as a pedagogical factor, scheduling was described by many participants as an important factor in the success of the inclusive classroom and should be added to the conceptual framework as a pedagogical factor. The master schedule of the school was cited as a factor that can be both a facilitator and a barrier to a successful inclusive education experience by general education and special education teachers. When the master schedule is able to meet the needs of all students in terms of staff assignments as well as provide time for collaboration and planning, participants indicated that the inclusive education environment is more successful for their students. Some participants described the process of creating a master schedule as one that involved departmentalization of teachers so that they can specialize in one specific subject area and have a working relationship with teachers in that subject area. Responses on this topic seemed to indicate that a master schedule is a very important consideration in the effectiveness of an inclusive education program.

When secondary teachers did not work in a departmentalized setting, the special education teacher was required to modify work for up to eight classes, which was described as being very difficult and a barrier to the successful inclusion of students with

complex support needs. Often, when there were so many classes that required modifications, the teacher could not complete them and the student went to class without the modifications or a paraprofessional was asked to facilitate making them.

Similarly, scheduling became difficult when one special education teacher was required to serve multiple grade levels. Even with a smaller caseload, serving multiple grades made it difficult to provide services directly to students without relying on paraprofessionals to provide the services and report back on student progress.

Lastly, student schedules were an important factor that could be a facilitator or a barrier to successful inclusion. Clustering, or placing all students with disabilities in one classroom, was described as a significant barrier to inclusion because there were too many students with disabilities in the classroom. In some instances, teachers had ten or more students with disabilities in their classrooms. Research supports that the ratio of students with disabilities should be a maximum of 10-12% in order to create a healthy classroom environment and avoid creating an at-risk classroom (Stetson Associates, personal communication, November 6, 2020).

Training. Teachers and school staff must be trained to be effective implementers of inclusive education. When teachers and school staff have training and professional development opportunities, they are able to provide better instruction and meaningful interactions for their students. Curriculum also likely plays a role in the successful inclusion of students with complex support needs when the curriculum is modified and adapted to meet the needs of the student, and when it is appropriate for the developmental level of the student.

Training teachers is vital in preparing teachers for the duties and expectations of an inclusive classroom (Zagona, et al., 2017; Mader, 2017; McClesky & Waldron, 2002). Training for both special education and general education teachers was discussed, as both general education and special education participants believed that it was important for all involved in the inclusive education program to learn more about inclusion. This was especially important for new teachers, who were perceived as being "thrown in" to the classroom without training, which makes it difficult to create an effective inclusive environment.

Similarly, paraprofessional training was cited as a barrier to the successful inclusion of some students with complex support needs. This is because paraprofessionals are not teachers and require more training to know how to best support their students. This finding is supported by research that notes that many paraprofessionals come into their positions without adequate training or the ability to understand and meet their job description (Moshe & Licht, 2016).

Curriculum. The curriculum for students was largely described as a barrier by general education and special education participants, especially in grades three and above. Participants described it as a barrier because their students are required to read and make inferences, engaging in higher-level thinking tasks that were often difficult. Previous research supports the idea that the general education curriculum is not accessible to students with complex support needs and that accommodations and modifications must be utilized in order to provide students with appropriate access to the curriculum (Downing & Peckham- Hardin, 2007). While reading curriculum was described as a barrier, math was described in a similar way. Participants described the

difficulty in teaching concepts such as algebra to students with complex support needs who were unable to access the concepts and required instruction to be leveled or tiered.

Participants also cited participation in the Standards of Learning (SOL) testing as a barrier that influences student success in the general education classroom. This is supported by previous research findings, which demonstrate that teachers have concerns about how students will participate in high-stakes testing (Baaken, 2010; Halle & Dymond, 2008). Alternatively, participants described having a student on the alternate curriculum as a barrier because it made planning and implementation of teaching difficult.

Methods and Strategies. Participants discussed utilizing a variety of strategies to support students with complex support needs in the general education classroom, and these strategies were described by teachers as being strategies that can benefit both special education and general education students, as described above in finding one. These included coteaching, explicit instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), technology, memory aids and strategies, preteaching, frequent breaks, movement, peer buddies, physical tools or manipulatives, and visual aids.

Co-teaching was discussed as an important means of supporting students with complex support needs in accessing the inclusive environment by both general education and special education teachers because the special education teacher could be present to modify materials and instruction in a way that allowed all students to learn at their level. Alternate and station teaching methods were cited as the most useful by participants because they allowed the groups to be more manageable and gave teachers the opportunity to truly address student needs. This is similar to findings from Sweigart and

Landrum (2015), which documented the effectiveness of co-teaching because of the ability to provide multiple types of instruction and increased opportunities for students to respond.

One participant described using explicit instruction as a way to teach expected behaviors to students within the cotaught setting. For a student with significant aggressive behaviors, she was able to teach him what it meant to "have a safe body" and other similar concepts. One interesting finding is the fact that explicit instruction was described by only one participant. This finding may indicate that teachers do not see explicit instruction as a strategy because it is built in to their coteaching models or that it is not being used regularly by many participants.

When people were available to support the learning of students with complex support needs, participants indicated that students were able to make gains and experience success in the general education setting. Staffing was considered vital in making inclusion work and ensuring its success.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was also discussed as a useful strategy because it allows students to represent their knowledge in a variety of ways. Students are able to show their understanding in a way that is accessible to them. Alternatively, teachers can provide instruction using the principles of UDL so that students can access their learning through a variety of access points that are at their level of learning. Within the context of UDL, there were eleven participants who discussed using differentiation or modification to provide their students with access to both content and assessment. While special education teachers specifically discussed how they modified or differentiated content, general education participants were aware that the modifications occurred but

could not describe specific modifications to work. Both general education and special education teacher participants also reported that their students were more successful when provided with work that was differentiated and modified for their needs, which is aligned to previous findings that described the ability of content modification and differentiation to allow students to act as active participants in their learning as well as show decreases in maladaptive behaviors (Lee, et al., 2010).

This strategy was considered vital in making inclusion work for students with complex support needs, and was often utilized with technology. Technology was discussed as a strategy for facilitating inclusion for students with complex support needs by both general education and special education teachers. It allowed for modification of materials as well as increased access for students with disabilities. Technology was specifically useful for students with physical disabilities who required support and assistance to engage in the writing process in a traditional manner. They were able to use specific technologies to support communication and demonstrate understanding of content. Students could use speech to text to complete their work and focus specifically on the content they were learning as opposed to having to focus on how to write and form letters. Students could also utilize technology programs to demonstrate their learning in nontraditional ways that still allowed teachers to know what information students had retained. Teachers noted that their students were more successful when they were given the opportunity to show their understanding of the content using technology. In addition to demonstrating understanding of content, technology was also useful in teaching students concepts because it allowed teachers to utilize the principles of UDL in teaching

content to their students. This meant that teachers could provide access points to their students that were both meaningful and helpful in their learning.

In addition to the use of UDL, participants also utilized techniques that supported their students in truly understanding and comprehending concepts. General education teachers described using memory aids and other devices to help their students recall information as being important strategies to support the inclusion of their students with and without disabilities. Pneumonic devices were described as helping to trigger memory for students learning names of people or locations on the map. In addition, concepts were reviewed and repeated consistently during each unit so that students would have the opportunity to hear about the concept multiple times per day, per class.

This was used across units in order to engage in the spiral review process. In this process, students would hear about concepts multiple times and over multiple units so that the most foundational concepts were interwoven in instruction. Repetition and spiral review was explicitly described by general education participants, which may be influenced by the idea that special education teachers use repetition as a regular part of their practice or that it is not considered important by special education teachers.

Special education participants, however, described preteaching as vital in exposing their students to content to help familiarize them with it and introduce them to it before delving into the content or materials. It was described as important in helping students in their ability to participate in the general education curriculum because it had already been introduced to the students at a prior time. Teachers described using preteaching to share vocabulary with their students as well as to summarize parts of the story, which aligns with the commonly suggested uses of preteaching (Smets & Struyven,

2018). Preteaching could be utilized with the whole class, as some participants described, or in small group settings. Small groups were an additional strategy utilized in providing students with access to an inclusive education to target specific skills and objectives for both special education and general education students.

Participants also cited frequent breaks, movement, peer buddies, and visual aids as strategies that they found useful in supporting their students with complex needs. These strategies were primarily discussed by special education teachers, who indicated that they were the ones implementing these strategies to support their students on an individual or small group level, with the exception of the use of movement. Frequent breaks were utilized by participants as a way to provide their students with an opportunity to calm down and refocus in a quiet space typically in a separate room from their peers for a short period of time (typically between five and ten minutes). This allowed the students to refocus and prepare themselves, and receive a sensory break if needed, to meaningfully participate in their learning in the general education classroom setting.

Similarly, movement was used to teach students content as well as to support students in taking a break and refocus before returning to learning. While primarily discussed by special education teachers, one general education teacher discussed her use to movement to help students retain concepts and ideas. Participants described using movement to teach students about angles and plotting points on a graph, as well as the characteristics of geographical areas. Songs were also described as being helpful because they engaged students and kept them busy while also providing them with a short break from potentially overwhelming academic content.

There were two special education teacher participants who discussed using peer buddies as an important strategy to support inclusive education, stating that peer buddies could be behavioral models as well as provide support with academics. The teachers indicated that their students who were in classes with peer buddies were able to participate actively in the classroom and increase their engagement in the content. This supports previous research findings relating to the importance of peer buddies and the potential for peer buddies to increase classroom participation as well as help develop social supports (Carter, et al, 2015).

In addition to utilizing peers, teachers also described the importance of visual aids in helping students with complex support needs to meaningfully participate in the general education curriculum. Visual aids included schedules, cue cards, vocabulary visuals, and other pictures to support instruction. Visual aids were described as aiding in recognition of content and student memory and supporting independence in task completion. This is supported by research findings, which indicate that students can move towards task independence when provided with and explicitly taught the meaning of visuals (Cohen & Demchak, 2018).

Teachers and school staff who are able to use some or all of these strategies, including some components of each, may be able to better create an inclusive environment that allows all students to learn. This factor is important in the conceptual framework for this study.

Pedagogical Decisions. Teachers' pedagogical decisions about the structure and organization of their classrooms, interactions with students, activities, resources, and student engagement can also impact all aspects of a student's educational experience,

including placement and type of instruction. Teachers who make pedagogical decisions that consider providing students with access seem to be promoters of inclusion and may contribute to the successes of inclusion.

Within the context of pedagogy, one participant described classroom management as being a facilitator of inclusion, noting that she felt that she was more successful as a teacher and that her students were more successful because of her classroom management techniques and skills. She described creating an environment with a significant amount of structure and the importance of providing that for her students to increase their success. This finding is interesting, as it seems that classroom management would be cited as an important factor in the success of all students.

Specific Programs. One participant also discussed a specific program as being a facilitator for the inclusion of her students. Special Olympics was described as being important in facilitating inclusion for the elementary-aged students of one participant because they came directly to the school and provided people to help facilitate the event. The events are free, inclusive of all students, and bring their own materials. While this was mentioned by only one participant, it is likely that other programs with a similar model could help to facilitate inclusion by providing additional resources and they should be added to the conceptual framework.

Recommendations

There is limited information available about how to create a successful inclusive education experience for students with complex support needs and how their teachers understand that experience and create meaning from it. This study highlights the need for teachers to have strategies to implement inclusive education practices for their students,

the factors that influence the success of the inclusive education environment as well as the things that teachers perceive they need to support inclusion, and continued research for how to create a successful inclusive environment for students with complex support needs. The findings from this study have resulted in the following recommendations so that they can be used to guide future considerations and support the success of students and staff in the inclusive setting.

Recommendations for Practice

When considering recommendations for practitioners and educational practices, the findings of this study seem to indicate that teachers need to be prepared for successfully including their students in the general education setting and that there is a need for more training and awareness about special education.

Teachers Need to be Prepared for Successfully Including their Students in the General Education Setting.

Both general education and special education teachers need to be prepared and possess the skills required to include students specifically with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting. Students with complex support needs may have significant needs beyond those of the normal student, and their teachers will need to understand those needs and how it can impact access to education. It is vital that school districts and teacher preparation programs provide exposure and instruction on the best practices for educating students with complex support needs.

Teachers described using a variety of strategies with their students with complex support needs and recognized their importance in allowing students to access their education. These results indicate that teachers must be prepared and taught how to use

these strategies in meaningful ways that will support their students in learning. Additionally, both general education and special education teachers need to be able to implement the strategies, as opposed to special education teachers being the primary people to develop and implement them. This also contributes to the concept of shared responsibility of students, a concept that can be important in supporting students in a collaborative manner.

There is a Need for More Training and Awareness About Special Education

Perhaps the most important factor in preparing students to include students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting is providing teachers with training to support the inclusion of those students. Teacher preparation is also important in influencing teacher perceptions of students with complex support needs and facilitating an understanding of their disabilities, which leads to a positive and inclusive culture. Both general education and special education teachers who are in an inclusive culture and have positive perceptions of their students with complex support needs are vital in supporting students in the inclusive setting. These positive perceptions help to encourage understandings of unique student needs and facilitate a positive relationship between students and teachers.

Part of this positive culture is the understanding of students' unique needs and their disabilities. Practice can improve upon the understanding of student disabilities through the implementation of training that supports understanding and awareness of student special educational needs. Participants in this study overwhelmingly indicated that they did not receive adequate training to support their understanding of student needs and that a significant amount of their learning was an "on the job" type of learning. It is

the duty and responsibility of school districts to start making their staff members aware of the needs of students with disabilities so that those students can be better served in their classrooms.

The most important and fundamental part of this training can be focused specifically on disability culture and information that can support teacher and staff members' understanding of their students' disabilities, which, in turn, creates opportunities for the development of positive perceptions of those students. These positive perceptions and increased awareness can help to support a positive experience for both teachers and students. Focusing on providing training opportunities that include people with disabilities as experts and trainers will also be vital in giving the disability community a voice. This disability culture training will help to create a broad shift in thinking among the school community and support active engagement and participation of all members of the school community regardless of ability.

Additional training should focus on the individual needs of districts and schools, providing detailed information and training based on the students and the populations that they serve. This can allow the teachers and staff members working at those schools to have a detailed understanding of the needs of their students, allowing them to better support them.

An interesting finding from this study was the barrier of understanding from general education teachers and administrators. Special education teacher participants noted that these groups were required only to take one introduction course to disabilities and that it influenced their understanding and ability to support students with complex support needs. General education teachers also discussed their lack of training and their

dependence on the special education teacher because of the limited training they received. This finding supports the idea that general education teachers and special education teachers should take similar coursework so that they can understand the needs of their students and feel confident and comfortable having students with complex support needs in their general education classes. This can also help them to be able to provide much-needed supports to students with complex support needs.

Coursework focusing on strategies for supporting students with complex support needs and how to use them in the general education setting could also be a beneficial addition to teacher preparation programs. Both general education and special education teachers could benefit from coursework focused on best practices for co-teaching and managing behavior, as well as in specific strategies and methods for working with students with disabilities. When teachers are trained and able to implement effective strategies, the success of the inclusive educational program can continue.

In addition to training opportunities and coursework, it is important that school systems have experts such as inclusion coaches or inclusion facilitators to support school staff members as they begin implementing inclusive practices. These experts can help to support a holistic approach to education that focuses on student growth in all areas, including both academic and social areas. These coaches can also be vital in providing training and professional development to school staff members supporting students with complex support needs.

This finding is supported by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission K-12 Special Education in Virginia Report to the Governor and General Assembly (2020), which recommends that teacher preparation programs be reevaluated to consider

whether or not they teach about differentiation, the role of general education teachers in the IEP process, co-teaching, and the importance of inclusive education. The report also recommends that the license renewal process requires teachers to take training in working with students with disabilities as well as a requirement for administrators to receive additional training on working with students with disabilities.

Consider Changes in the Standard Grading System

When discussing how they measured the success of the inclusive program, participants described looking at the growth and progress of their students, which included both IEP goal mastery and movement towards skill mastery. One participant even discussed the importance of looking past traditional grades to look at the success of her students.

Despite this finding that seems to indicate that success is measured outside of grades, the current grading system continues to utilize this antiquated system. One practice recommendation that resulted from this study is a change in the current standard grading system. A move from the current letter grade system to a system that focuses on documenting student growth and progress as opposed to accuracy in demonstrating a skill may support a more successful inclusive experience for students with complex support needs who may find it difficult to be successful under the current grading system.

While there has been some movement towards a standards-based reporting system, this system still focuses on marking the student's mastery of grade level standards based on state requirements for that grade level. Depending on its implementation, such reporting methods can still limit student success in the inclusive educational environment.

Recommendations for Leadership and Advocacy

Effective leadership and advocacy are vital in achieving the inclusive mission. Leadership at a variety of levels can support this mission. At the federal level, policy changes can be made to support the inclusion of students with complex support needs, which may include a reauthorization of IDEA that provides strong language focusing on inclusive education opportunities and creates an expectation that all students are afforded opportunities to learn next to their same-aged peers. This, along with *Dear Colleague* letters to provide guidance to schools and districts, could be used to begin shepherding an inclusive mission and vision.

At the state level, leadership could continue to support this mission and vision by allocating funding and resources to school districts that can be used to provide opportunities for inclusive education experiences. Additionally, state policies can focus on ensuring personnel resources are properly allocated and are utilized in ways that support the inclusion of students with complex support needs.

Within individual school districts, superintendents and administrators can help to steward a mission and vision that puts educational access at the forefront of their strategic plan. This includes developing a written plan for supporting increased inclusion, but also in ensuring funding is allocated towards resources needed for inclusion, including training and materials. When schools and districts convey these beliefs and show a dedication to the success of their students with disabilities, the teachers and school staff members working within them can begin to do the work of inclusion.

Recommendations for Future Research

When considering the recommendations for future research, the findings of this study support the need for continued research on how to support students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting, continued research on supporting teachers to successfully work with students with complex support needs, and continued research on the outcomes for students with complex support needs who are included in the general education classroom setting.

Continued Research on How to Support Students with Complex Support Needs in the General Education Classroom Setting

Research specific to the outcomes of inclusive education for students with complex support needs has shown that all students with disabilities make progress in the general education setting regardless of severity of disability or any other factor (Jorgensen, 2017). While research has shown that inclusion is successful for students, there is limited research focusing on how to effectively provide an inclusive education, specifically for students with complex support needs. Further research can focus on the best ways to have successful outcomes for students with complex support needs in the inclusive education environment.

Research that focuses on the tools and strategies used to specifically support students with complex support needs while they are in the general education classroom setting is limited. As such, continued research can focus on the specific needs of students with complex support needs and the strategies that can support their progress and learning in the general education setting.

While many strategies have been supported by research, there is limited research on how those strategies have been applied specifically with students who have complex

support needs that are included in the general education classroom for the majority of the school day. Further research can investigate the use of research-based strategies that have been shown to work in the special education setting in the general education setting. By applying these strategies in the general education classroom and monitoring the outcomes of their use, researchers can help to develop a better understanding of how students can best be supported within the general education classroom setting.

As research continues to develop a deeper understanding of how to support students with complex support needs in the inclusive setting, an inclusion framework can be developed as a guide for practitioners. This framework can be vital in helping teachers and schools to be prepared to support their students with complex support needs as well as evaluate their programs to find areas of strengths and gaps that could be closed with changes rooted within the framework.

Continued Research on Supporting School Staff Members to Successfully Work with Students with Complex Support Needs

Continued research focusing on how to support school staff members so that they are successful in working with students with complex support needs is necessary and supported by the results of this research. In order to utilize appropriate methods and strategies to support the learning of students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting, both general education and special education teachers must be prepared and have a deep understanding of how to support the students.

All teachers and school personnel working with students with complex support needs may require specialized preparation to teach them how to best support students who have these complex needs. This specialized training could occur at the university or

school district level, but is vital in supporting students with the most needs in schools. Additional research can focus on developing a needs assessment for teachers and paraprofessionals that can be used to guide training and professional development focuses within schools or school districts.

Summary

This study focused on the perspectives of sixteen general education and special education teachers relating to their experiences in providing students with complex support needs with their education in the general education classroom setting. Participants discussed their experiences in educating students with complex support needs, and findings centered around themes that included the need for teachers to have strategies to work with students with complex support needs, planning and monitoring for program outcomes, and the factors that influence successful inclusion for students with complex support needs. Future recommendations for both practice and research were discussed.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

Dr. Karen Ihrig and Paige Bradford are working to conduct a study among school staff members working in a school or classroom that serves students with complex support needs in an inclusive school setting. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the experiences of school staff members in inclusive settings around the inclusion of students with complex support needs. Your participation will provide a unique perspective that will allow us to better understand your experience of inclusion and how it has been implemented.

The study will consist of one virtual interview (conducted via an online platform such as Skype and lasting approximately one hour) as well as one to three classroom observations lasting 30 minutes to 1 hour each. Your identity and all other identifying information will be kept confidential and private throughout the duration of the study.

Attached to this email is an informed consent document for potential participants that provides further details about our study. After reviewing this document, if you are interested in

participating in the study, please contact us via pkbradford@gwmail.gwu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Paige Bradford

Appendix B

Follow-up Potential Interviewee Email

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thank you for your interest in participating in our study. The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of school staff members in including students with complex support needs in the general education classroom setting. We believe that collecting stories of school staff members will help us better understand the experience of including students with complex support needs. As current school staff members, you have first-hand knowledge of both facilitators and barriers of inclusive education.

Our research team is interested in conducting a focus group with participants that meet the following criteria: (1) be a school staff member and work with students with disabilities who are included in the public school general classroom for at least 50% of the school day or have knowledge of and experience working with students included in the general education classroom or of the faculty and staff and (2) have worked in your position for at least one year

The study will involve an interview and an optional review of your lesson plans in which your identity and recorded data will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared. Any information identifying you as a respondent, such as an email, will not be connected with the data collected. All such correspondence and data will be destroyed after the completion of this study.

If you are interested in participating in the study and sharing your experiences, please let me know. At the time of the interview, I will review these aforementioned goals, the study's process, as well as the measures our research team will take to prevent any personally identifying information (ex. your name) from being shared. Please be assured that respecting your privacy and confidentiality is of primary concern to us. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any point in time.

Thank you for taking the time to review this and for considering participation in this study. We value the unique contribution that you can make to our study and are excited about the possibility of your participation! I can be reached via email at (pkbradford@gwmail.gwu.edu) or (kihrig@gwu.edu). I hope to speak to you soon.

Sincerely,
Paige Bradford

Appendix C

Interview Confirmation Email

Dear [Name of Confirmed Participant],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview, observation, and lesson plan review as part of our research. As previously agreed, the interview will take place on [date] via Skype starting at [time]. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

Before the interview begins, I would like to make sure that you are aware of the following:

- The George Washington University Office of Human Research has given permission for

this research to be carried out.

- With your permission the interview will be recorded.
- Your confidentiality will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by

name in any written document or verbal presentation. Nor will any data be used from the interview that might identify you to a third party.

- You are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- We will write to you upon completion of the research and a copy of our final research

report will be made available to you upon request.

If you have any questions regarding the nature of the research and your participations or are unclear about any of the provided information, please contact me/us at (pkbradford@gwmail.gwu.edu) or (kihrig@gwu.edu).

Thank you again for taking the time to help me with my research. I look forward to the interview on [date] at [time].

Sincerely,
Paige Bradford

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Title of research study: A Qualitative Study of Programs Including Students with Complex Support Needs in the General Education Curriculum

Investigators: Dr. Karen Ihrig, Paige Bradford

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study? We invite you to take part in a research study because of your experiences working in an inclusive school and classroom setting with a student with complex support needs. Your participation is completely voluntary. You have been found eligible for this study because you are an employee or staff member who works in a school identified as being inclusive for students with disabilities. We hope to better understand how teachers and school staff members have experienced inclusion for their students with complex support needs and the methods and strategies that they use to do so. In this study:

- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the member of your research team:

Washington DC Metropolitan Area: Dr. Karen Ihrig, Assistant Professor, kihrig@gwu.edu, 202-994-5986

Why is this research being done? The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of school staff members in including students with complex support needs in the general education classroom. The study seeks to develop an understanding of how school staff members work to include students with complex support needs.

How long will I be in the study?

We expect that you will be in this research study for an interview that will last approximately one hour.

What happens if I agree to be in this research? A time will be scheduled to complete one interview over an online platform such as Skype that will last approximately one hour. This interview will consist of questions designed to help you share your

experiences as an employee working in an inclusive setting that includes students with complex support needs. At any time you may choose to end your participation. After the interview has been transcribed the interviewer will contact you to see if you would like to see the transcripts.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? There are no physical risks associated with the study, but there is a risk of loss of confidentiality or privacy of the subjects. There are multiple procedures in place to de-identify your information and protect against any loss of confidentiality *(see "What happens to the information collected for the research?" section below)*. To the extent allowed by law, we limit your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information. There is some psychological risk in being asked to share personal information. There are also some possible risks of confidentiality. The privilege of confidentiality does not extend to information about sexual or physical abuse of a child. If any member of the research team has or is given such information, he or she is required to report it to the appropriate authority or agency, such as child protective services, a law enforcement agency, or your State's toll-free child abuse reporting hotline. The obligation to report includes past and current alleged or reasonably suspected abuse as well as past or current known abuse. Examples of such abuse include physically harming your child or having inappropriate sexual contact with your child.

Will being in this study help me in any way? There are no guaranteed benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, some benefits may include the opportunity to share your experiences with researchers. There is no benefit outside of this sharing of experiences. Other professionals in the field may benefit from the results of the study because it may help them to understand how to include students with complex support needs.

What happens to the information collected for the research? Your identity and recorded data from the interview will be kept private and confidential throughout the study, and no identifying information will be shared. Any information identifying you as a respondent, such as an email, will not be connected with the data collected. We cannot promise complete secrecy. All such correspondence and data will be destroyed after the completion of this study. The IRB and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information. Please be informed that the following steps are being taken to protect your identity:

1. Each participant will be assigned a fictional name, which will be used for interview transcriptions as opposed to including real participant and dependent names

with the interview data.

2. Each participant's interview data will also be assigned a number code that is randomly generated to assist with the organization of data and also protection of confidentiality.

3. The interview will be recorded by a digital audio recording device and then transcribed into written form. The digital audio recordings of the interviews will be stored in a locked drawer on location with members of the research team until the manual transcription is complete. Once the transcripts are completed, the digital audio recordings will be destroyed.

4. The computer files will be stored on password protected computers only available to the research team. The files will not have the participants' names. The research team will have a list that matches the randomly assigned number with the assigned fictional name and contact information given by the participant (i.e., phone number or email address). The computer files will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

5. All email communications will be stored on password-protected computers in a password-protected email system for the duration of the study. All email correspondence will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

6. Hard copy data files of the transcripts will be stored without the participants' names in a locked space by the research team. Access to the files will only be available to the research team and destroyed at the completion of the study.

7. The research team will not release any information about the participants' involvement without written permission from the participant, unless required by law.

8. All email contacts, participant contact information, and data sets will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

What else do I need to know?

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published articles or presentations, no information will be included that makes it possible to identify you as a participant in the study. All participants and dependents will be assigned pseudonyms, which they will be referred to throughout the entirety of the interview process. These pseudonyms will be used to quote the student in any publication that may result from the research. Your records for the study may be reviewed by the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and by departments within The George Washington University that are responsible for overseeing research safety and compliance.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Introduction: As described in the consent form, your participation in this interview is part of a study to explore the ways that school staff members work to include students with complex support needs in the general education classroom. Your time and insight on this topic is very valuable to my dissertation and will give you an opportunity to share your thoughts on inclusive practices. Please be as honest as possible in your responses.

Specify the confidentiality policy: The interview is voluntary and you can decline to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. Any identifying information will not be included in the final product and all data will be kept secure.

Ask permission to tape record the interview: In order to ensure accuracy, I would like to record the session. This recording will be used to transcribe today's conversation. Would you be comfortable with me tape recording? If no: I will still be taking down written notes.

Demographics

1. What is your current position?
2. Can you tell me about your experience(s) working in the school setting?
3. What age groups do you work with or have you worked with?
4. Which special education settings have you worked in? Has the setting been primarily general education or self-contained?
5. What training have you had around inclusion or inclusive practices? Where did you receive the training?
6. When you were told that you would be working in an inclusive setting, what preparation was required for you to receive the student(s)?
7. Can you share a time when you saw successful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?
8. Can you talk about some things that you think help you to successfully include students? Are there specific resources or strategies that you think were helpful?

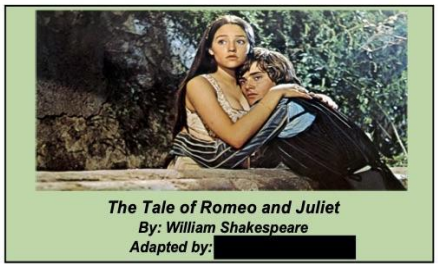
9. Can you share a time when you saw unsuccessful inclusion for students with complex support needs? What did that look like?
10. Can you describe any specific evidence-based practices to promote inclusion?
11. What is the role of the school administrator in inclusion?
12. Can you talk about how you measure whether inclusion is working and how you engage in ongoing evaluation and reflection of the program?
13. Can you talk about some things that you think create barriers to inclusion and inclusive practices?
14. What do you feel is the greatest facilitator for inclusion in the school?
15. Can you share about a time when you taught grade-level content to a student with complex support needs?
16. Can you describe a time when you saw students with complex support needs interacting with or engaging with peers?
17. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding inclusion in your school?

Appendix F

Sample Modifications from Participant 6

Adapted *Romeo and Juliet*

10/12/20



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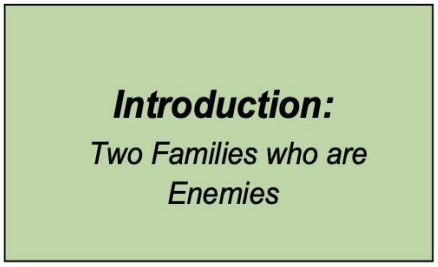

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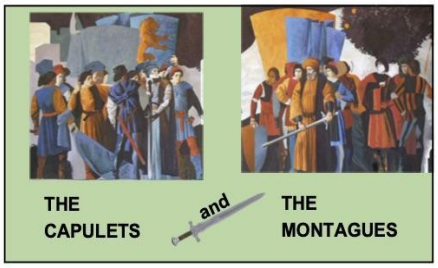

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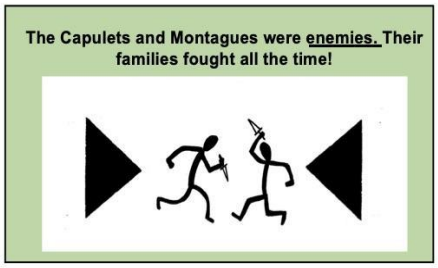

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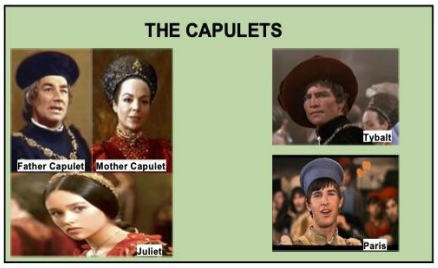

6

1

Juliet is a Capulet.

7

A rich man named Paris has just asked Juliet's father if he can marry Juliet.

8

Juliet's mother wants Juliet to marry Paris. Juliet's father says that the decision will be up to Juliet.

9

Juliet is not interested in Paris!

10

THE MONTAGUES

11

Romeo is a Montague.

12

Romeo is sad. He likes a girl who does not like him back!

13

Romeo's friend Benvolio tries to cheer Romeo up. Benvolio says, "Come on Romeo! There's plenty of girls out there!"

14

Benvolio says, "I know what will cheer you up! The Capulets are having a party tonight! Let's sneak in!"

15

Then Benvolio says, "There will be lots of girls at the party! You might find one you like!"

16

Romeo doesn't want to go to the party at first, but Benvolio convinces him it will be fun!

17

Stop! Make a prediction about Act 2 before we read!

The Montagues and the Capulets are <u>enemies!</u>
The Capulets are having a party at their castle, and two Montague boys are going to sneak in!
What might happen at the party??!

18

Act 1: Party at the Capulet's

19

Romeo and Benvolio sneak into the Capulet's party.

20

A Capulet cousin, Tybalt, sees Romeo at the party. Tybalt is very mad that a Montague is there.

21

Tybalt tells father Capulet that the Montague boys snuck into the party, but father Capulet says Romeo and Benvolio can stay.

22

Romeo is feeling nervous about being at the Capulet's party, but then something amazing happens!

23

The most beautiful girl Romeo has ever seen walks into the room!

24

Romeo walks over to the girl and says, "I never knew true beauty until tonight!"

25

Romeo tells the beautiful girl, "I would like very much to kiss you. May I have your permission to kiss you?"

26

The beautiful girl is embarrassed, but she says, "Yes. You can kiss me."

27

Romeo leans in and gives the beautiful girl a kiss.

28

Then, Romeo feels bad and says, "I'm sorry that I kissed you."

29

But the beautiful girl surprises Romeo by saying, "Don't feel bad! Let's kiss again!"

30

Lord of the Flies -- Chapter 7
"Shadows and Small Trees"

After being on the island for so long, Ralph is thinking about how he would like a haircut and toothbrush.

Simon started speaking, almost in Ralph's ear. Ralph found that Simon had a rock painfully gripped in both hands, found his body arched, the muscles of his neck stiff, his mouth strained open.

"You'll get back to where you came from," Simon said and nodded as he spoke. He was kneeling on one knee.

"How do you know that?" Ralph asked. Then, when Simon was still silent Ralph said curtly, "You're batty."

Simon shook his head violently till the coarse black hair flew backwards and forwards across his face. "No, I'm not. I just hope you'll get back all right." For a moment nothing more was said. And then they suddenly smiled at each other.

Later, the group is hunting again (the beast at first, then food when it is available)--

The pig was running away from them. They found another pig run parallel to the first and Jack raced away. Ralph was full of fright and apprehension and pride. "I hit him! The spear stuck in—"

Now they came, unexpectedly, to an open space by the sea. Jack cast about on the bare rock and looked anxious.

"He's gone."

"I hit him," said Ralph again, "and the spear stuck in a bit. Didn't you see me?"

Maurice nodded. “I saw you. Right bang on his snout—Wheee!”

Ralph talked on, excitedly. “I hit him all right. The spear stuck in. I wounded him!” He stunned himself in their new respect and felt that hunting was good after all.

Jack shouted. “Make a ring around it!”

The circle moved in and round. Robert squealed in mock terror, then in real pain. “Ow! Stop it! You’re hurting!”

The butt end of a spear fell on his back. Now the group was pretending that Robert was a pig, and starting to “hunt” him.

“Hold him!” Jack shouted.

They got his arms and legs. Ralph, carried away by a sudden thick excitement, grabbed Eric’s spear and jabbed at Robert with it.

“Kill him! Kill him!” some of the boys yelled. (Again, they are jabbing at one of the boys-Robert).

All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with the strength of frenzy. Jack had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife. Behind him was Roger, fighting to get close. The chant rose ritually, as at the last moment of a dance or a hunt.

“Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig!!”

Ralph too was fighting to get near, to get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-powering. Jack’s arm came down; the heaving circle cheered and made pig-dying noises. Then they lay quiet, panting, listening to Robert’s frightened cries. He wiped his face with a dirty arm, and made an effort to retrieve his status.

“Oh, my bum!” He rubbed his butt ruefully.

Jack rolled over. “That was a good game.”

“Just a game,” said Ralph uneasily and a bit ashamed at what the group had just done.

“We ought to have a dr” said Maurice, “then we could do it properly.”

Ralph looked at him. “How properly?”

“I dunno. You want a fire, I think, and a dr and you keep time to the drum.”

“You want a pig,” said Roger, “like a real hunt.”

“Or someone to pretend,” said Jack. “You could get someone to dress up as a pig and then he could act—you know, pretend to knock me over and all that.”

“You want a real pig,” said Robert, still caressing his rump, “because you’ve got to kill him.”

“Use a littlun,” said Jack, and everybody laughed.
By now, Ralph had decided to think of this “hunt” as though he were playing chess- a normal game. The only trouble was that he would never be a very good chess player. He thought of the littluns and Piggy back at camp. Vividly he imagined Piggy by himself, huddled in a shelter that was silent except for the sounds of nightmare from the littluns. “We can’t leave the littluns alone with Piggy. Not all night.”

Jack cleared his throat and spoke in a sarcastic, tight voice. “We mustn’t let anything happen to Piggy, must we?”

Ralph tapped his teeth with the dirty point of Eric’s spear. “If we go across—”

Ralph glanced round him. “Someone’s got to go across the island and tell Piggy we’ll be back after dark.”

Bill spoke, unbelieving. “Through the forest by himself? Now? With the beast out there?”

“We can’t spare more than one,” said Jack.

Simon pushed his way to Ralph’s elbow. “I’ll go if you like. I don’t mind, honestly.”

“I’m going up the mountain.” The words came from Jack viciously, as though they were a curse. He looked at Ralph, holding his spear as if he threatened him. “I’m going up the mountain to look for the beast—now!” Jack took a step.

Ralph replied, “Well then—” and side by side, watched by silent boys, the two started up the mountain. Then, Ralph stopped. “We’re silly. Why should only two go? If we find anything, two won’t be enough.”

Astonishingly, a dark figure moved against the tide. “Roger?”

“Yes.”

“That’s three, then.”

The other boys go back to camp. Jack continues alone to the top. Ralph and Roger hesitate behind Jack.

There was a slithering noise high above them, the sound of someone taking giant and dangerous strides on rock or ash. Then Jack found them, and was shivering and croaking in a voice they could just recognize as his. “I saw a thing on top.”

They heard him blunder against the trunk which rocked violently. He lay silent for a moment, then muttered. “Keep a good lookout. It may be following.”

Jack sat up. “I saw a thing bulge up on the mountain.”

“You only imagined it,” said Ralph shakily, “because nothing would bulge. Not any sort of creature.”

For the first time since he had first known Jack, Ralph could feel him hesitate.

In front of them, only three or four yards away, was a rock-like hump where no rock should be. Ralph could hear a tiny chattering noise coming from somewhere— perhaps from his own mouth (teeth chattering). He gathered all the will he had inside of him and stood up. He took two giant steps forward.

Behind them the silver of moon had drawn clear of the horizon. Before them, something like a great ape was sitting asleep with its head between its knees. Then the wind roared in the forest, there was confusion in the darkness and the creature lifted its head, holding toward them the ruin of a face.

Ralph found himself taking giant strides among the ashes, heard other creatures crying out and leaping and dared the impossible on the dark slope; presently the mountain was deserted, save for the three abandoned sticks and the thing that bowed in front of them in the dark.

Constitutional Era Notes, Pt. 1 (After the War)

ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

- After the American Revolutionary War, the new independent (free) United States wanted to be _____ from England. They did not want to be like the king.

- America's **first new government** would be written down and called the **Articles of Confederation**. However it had to be changed because it was too _____.
The colonies would have to change the document to something stronger.

Positives (_____)	**Negatives** (_____)

Could borrow money, could make treaties (peace) with other countries, could manage Native American problems.	Couldn't tax (make money), couldn't regulate trade, didn't have common money, no judicial branch (judges) or executive branch (president)

PROBLEMS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

- America was also having _____ with other countries.

  - We were struggling to _____ with other countries after leaving Britain.

  - Spain was afraid we would take their _____.

  - France was mad because we owed them _____ after the war.

PROBLEMS AT HOME

People wanted to move _____.
The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 listed law and

order for moving and told people how they could become their own state.