

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFICACY OF INCLUSION
FOR THE GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT

by

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Dedication

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Abstract

TEACHERS' PERPECTIVES ON THE EFFICACY OF INCLUSION FOR THE GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENT

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Laws require special education students to be educated in the least restricted environment, which often means placing special education students with their general education peers in inclusion classroom settings. Inclusion classroom research has focused mainly on the efficacy for special education students, ignoring the effects of inclusion on the general education student, who make up the majority of students in K-12 education. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of four content and three special education teachers who teach in inclusion classrooms in a successful middle school in Texas regarding the efficacy of inclusion for teaching general education students in inclusion classrooms and how inclusion affects their learning. Social learning theory served as a lens to understand how inclusion helped or hindered student learning, including the role of peers in the acquisition of knowledge in inclusion classrooms and the effectiveness of inclusion for the general education student.

The study found that teachers note benefits of inclusion for all students such as learning empathy and having two adults to help in the classroom. However, most of the teachers felt inclusion was not working well for either the general education or the

special education students. The teachers cited the lack of teacher training, overcrowded classes, inconsistent support, large special education population, and a wide range of ability levels within one class among the challenges of inclusion. Recommendations and implications for practice, theory, and research are included.

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Chapter 1

Background of the Study

A primary objective of public education is academic success for all students. The federal government has addressed this goal in a number of ways dating as far back as the Lyndon Johnson presidency and his Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1969 (Fritzberg, 2012), which called for reform in K-12 education. Then, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (1983), compiled by President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, reported the concerns of the United States' government regarding the state of education. The report was a catalyst for education reform at the local, state, and federal levels of government. In 2001, President George W. Bush re-authorized ESEA calling the legislation, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (Fritzberg, 2012). As a result of this law, school districts were charged with the task of increasing achievement of all students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). More recently, the Obama administration provided *Race to the Top* grants in an effort to incentivize low-performing schools by offering them educational funds if they (a) adopt curricula that prepare students for college and work, (b) have data systems that measure student growth, and (c) have effective staff who help reverse the school's poor performance. Further, although controversial in some quarters¹, the National Governor's Association introduced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to help ensure a quality education for all students by developing basic academic standards, which are vertically aligned from pre-k through high school (Common Core,

¹ Some states have pulled back from testing and portions of the CCSS due to low scores, standards that seem too high, and technology glitches (Strauss, 2015).

2014). This initiative has been adopted by 45 states to better prepare every child for high school graduation and for college, career, and life (Common Core, 2014).

To further ensure equal educational opportunities for students, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) is a United States Supreme Court case that eliminated racial segregation in the schools. It also became foundational to challenging the policy of “separate but equal” in the United States as it related to the education of special education students (Blanchet, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005), who were often educated in separate buildings or classrooms from their non-special education peers. This was the beginning of several legislative policies that would be put in place to make a quality public education available to all students regardless of their abilities.

In 1990, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (Individuals, 1990) was enacted to educate all students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. That environment often brings students, regardless of their abilities, together in a single classroom, known as *inclusion* or *mainstreaming*. The LRE allows students with and without disabilities to be taught in one classroom with a general education teacher and a special education teacher for support. As a result, all these classes are made up of a majority of general education students without any identified special education needs, students with 504 designations (e.g., students with emotional issues, behavioral needs, and/or depression that need supports such as preferential seating, given a copy of teacher notes, and/or extended time on assignments), and special education students with a variety of special education needs (e.g., physical limitations, emotional disturbances, slow cognitive processing). It should be noted that these environments can vary drastically by the amount of time special education teachers spend and the

role they take in these classrooms. Nevertheless, the inclusion model has been widely adopted by schools to meet the educational needs of special education students as federally mandated regarding the LRE.

According to the United States Department of Education (2013), 95% of all students, ages six to 21, are/were taught in inclusion classrooms in public schools and 80% of all students are general education students. These national statistics are similar to those seen in Texas schools. The 2014 Texas Enrollment report (2014) found that Gifted and Talented enrollment was at 7.6% for the 2012-2013 school year and the Special Education enrollment was at 8.7%, leaving 83.7% of students classified as general education students. Therefore, 95% of general education students (Department of Education, 2013), nationally and in Texas, may be educated in classes with students who have special needs (i.e., inclusion classes) to be compliant with IDEA regulations.

The IDEA legislation also requires educators track the academic progress of all students to ensure every student receives the necessary supports. The tracking system is called Response to Intervention (RtI), which is a three-tiered process put in place to identify students with needs not being met in the classroom. This program places all students on tier one with the hope that the majority of children will be successful without any special services (McInerney & Elledge, 2013). As students show signs of academic struggle, teachers put in place interventions by degree to help them succeed. After the interventions have been in place for several weeks, a meeting occurs to see if students are doing better or if more intensive interventions (i.e., tier 2 or tier 3 supports) are needed. The RtI policy assumes that 80% of students will be successful academically

and not need additional supports in the form of 504 plans or special education designations.

Unfortunately, researchers contend that traditional inclusion programs, even with the support of RtI, do not seem to be meeting the academic needs of the general education or special education student (Bakker & Bosman, 2003; Berdine, 2003; Blackorby, Dyson, 2004; Lee, 2010b; Redmon, 1995; Rogers & Thiery, 2003; Schiller, Knokey, & Wagner, 2007). A look at student achievement data lends credence to this argument. Lee (2010b) analyzed several national databases (i.e., National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, and The National Education Longitudinal Study) from 1971 to 2004 and found that math and reading scores leveled off in middle school. According to the most recent Nation's Report Card (2014), which is a summary of the results of an assessment given to more than 500,000 students ages 9, 13, and 17 in public and private elementary and secondary schools every four years, there has been little academic progress in math or reading scores since 1971 (see appendices D and E) despite federally instituted education reforms, some of which dictate classroom makeup (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014a).

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) administers a group of assessments called Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). These data (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015) cover math and science achievement of fourth- and eighth-grade students from the United States and approximately 60 other countries from 1995 to 2013. Since 1995, U.S. eighth graders, generally, landed in ninth or 10th place in science and math.

Significantly, U.S. eighth graders lag behind Asian countries, Russia, Israel, and Finland in their math and science achievement. The majority of student data shows them performing in the intermediate- to low-score benchmark categories in these areas.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is another international measure of student achievement in 10th grade ([National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014b](#)). It tests math, science, and reading and is administered every three years to students who are 15 years of age. The first assessments were given in 2000. The most recent report is for the year 2012 where U.S. student average scores were down in math, science, and reading from 2009. Math and reading scores are both down from 2000 to 2012. The former U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, commented on the U.S. 2012 PISA performance by saying, “The big picture...is straightforward and stark. It is the picture of educational stagnation” (Harvey & Nicholson, 2014, p.72).

Texas state achievement results for seventh grade mirror the national statistics. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2015) (see Appendix F), there has been limited academic growth over the past 20 years in reading and math for seventh graders. TEA has changed assessments over the years making it more difficult to adequately compare academic growth. Nevertheless, Texas has been tracking student achievement scores since 1994 (see Appendix F) and shows a net gain of only 3% in reading over the 20-year period. The agency showed a slightly better net gain in math of 12% over the same period. Some caution must be used when reviewing these data. The TEA has not been consistent in what data they release and they stopped reporting average test scores after 2002. Also, the standardized test changed three times over

the course of the same 20-year period. Regardless of the test changes and reporting data, the same standards were tested so there is some consistently reported data allowing for analysis of academic growth over 20 years.

Although there is considerable research and data available on special education students in inclusion, there is little research on general education students in inclusion classes – particularly general education students in inclusion classrooms in middle school. The studies that explored this group indicate they fare about the same as their non-inclusion peers academically (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Dessemontet & Bless, 2013; McDonnell et al., 2003; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010). Unfortunately, success seems to be eluding both groups as shown in the most comprehensive national and international data as discussed above.

For this reason, it may be helpful to examine the largest student population that drives academic achievement statistics—the general education student. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand the efficacy of inclusion classrooms for general education students through the eyes of educators who work in these classrooms.

Orienting Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens for this study is Vygotsky's social learning theory. Vygotsky was interested in how learning takes place (Minick, 1987). He hoped to understand “the relation[ship] between human beings and their environment” (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978, p.19). The classroom is a social environment in which students are exposed to their peers in a learning situation where they have the

opportunity to observe each other while working independently and in groups. Vygotsky conceptualized the idea of *the zone of proximal development* (ZPD) to better understand how individuals learn. This ZPD is the space between what a child can do on her own and what she can do with adult guidance or by collaborating with more capable peers ([Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978](#)). His research found higher psychological functions are inherently social (Daniels, 2005). Through social interactions and exposure, learning takes place. The best learning is always in advance of development and enhanced when there is collaboration between more and less capable peers (Cole et al., 1978).

This theory lends itself to this study in a unique way. The roots of the inclusion-teaching model were based in part on the idea of social learning. Advocates of inclusion believed special education students would benefit (Kozulin, 2003) from the exposure and social interaction with their general education peers (Palinscar, 1998; Stang, 1975). Ruijs et al. (2010) confirmed in their study that one of the noted benefits of inclusion classrooms is the social interaction between general education and special education peers. Therefore, this theory should serve as an appropriate guide to help gain a better understanding of the impact of social learning in regards to general education students in inclusion classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

Since the late 1960s, education has undergone change and reform in an effort to increase academic achievement for *all* students. However, students in the U.S. have made, at best, modest gains in spite of substantial reform efforts. Many researchers (e.g., Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin,

2012; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009) have focused on the experience of special education students, but little has been done to better understand the experience of general education students in inclusion classrooms to gain insights about why they have not made academic gains.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore what is happening in inclusion classrooms through the eyes of educators with a focus on our largest population who drive academic accountability, the general education student. In order to understand the general education student, Social Learning Theory was used to provide the lens to look at issues of learning, because the main premise of inclusion is the idea that students learn best by exposure to their peers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers of inclusion classes perceive the traditional inclusion model's efficacy in meeting the academic needs of general education students?
2. How useful is Social Learning Theory in understanding the experience of general education students in inclusion classrooms?
3. What else was revealed about the traditional inclusion classroom model and general education students?

The Researcher

I am a secondary, public school English teacher who has taught in inclusion classes on the east coast and in the southwestern portions of the United States. I have worked with other teachers during traditional inclusion classes using a variety of co-

teaching models from joint participation with the special education teacher sharing an equal part of the actual teaching in the classroom to a teacher and helper model where the special education teacher does no teaching but helps to support the needs of all students in the inclusion classroom. I currently work at Green Valley Middle School, where this research was conducted, teaching eighth grade general and PreAP English.

Even though I have had extensive training in my own content area as well as in the use of co-teaching models in classroom environments, I have had limited training in special education. As a result, I have had difficulties providing the necessary supports to every student in inclusion classes where ability levels can range from several grades below to well above grade-level. Yet, I have a desire for all my students to be successful and have seen them struggle in these classroom settings. For these reasons, I want to understand how traditional inclusion can help not only the special education students excel, but the general education students, too. This study provides me with the opportunity to investigate the perceptions of teachers in a successful middle school working in traditional inclusion settings across different content areas to better understand their perceptions of the experience of general education students in these classrooms.

Significance of the Study

Much has been studied about special populations in education, but not much has been studied regarding the general education student and the impact inclusion classes have on their academic growth or success. This study will provide insights into how teachers at one middle school perceive the efficacy of the inclusion model as it serves the general education student. It will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding

general education students in traditional inclusion classrooms for educational purposes in the area of theory, research, and practice. This study may also shed light on an overlooked population in order to begin to better understand the reasons for limited academic growth for the past 40 years.

Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

Inclusion has moved from a theory for helping special education students to the standard for K-12 education. While initially conceived with special education students in mind, general education students are in inclusion settings most of the time due to regulations that require special education students to be educated in the least restricted environment (LRE) possible. Prior to inclusion classes, special education students were often educated in *resource*² classes, which, while reaching students on their academic level, restricted their exposure to more advanced curricula, peers and, ultimately, their educational potential.

There is a body of research regarding the inclusion model and how it benefits special education students (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Dessementet, Bless, & Morin, 2011; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009) academically and socially. Special education students' exposure to their general education peers has helped them develop social skills in ways that were not possible in the previous resource environment. There is some research supporting the benefits attributed to the inclusion of special education students in inclusion classroom settings finding all students' social skills improve. Similarly, exposure to general education curriculum with support from special education teachers in an inclusion classroom has helped some special education students achieve more.

² Resource classes are for students who are functioning two or more years below grade level in English language arts or math. These classes have lower student population who receive specialized instruction at the grade level they function on in classrooms away from their peers.

However, the literature on general education students' academic progress in inclusion classes outside of elementary school is sparse at best. Due to laws and regulations regarding special education, the general education student is not identified as being in inclusion classes in any collected datasets. Yet, there is some evidence that over a 40-year period there has been very little academic progress in spite of education reforms implemented through the re-authorization of ESEA. Research seems to indicate that teachers are accepting of the idea of inclusion classes in theory, but feel they are not supported or prepared to teach inclusion classes (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

In this chapter, I explore IDEA, which was the catalyst for inclusion classrooms. Then, I examine the problems, challenges, and benefits identified by previous research regarding inclusion classrooms. This is followed by the co-teaching models associated with inclusion teaching, research concerning general education and special education students in inclusion, the uniqueness and challenges of middle school students, and teacher attitudes regarding educating students in inclusion classrooms. I conclude this section with a discussion of the theoretical framework.

Individuals With Disabilities and Education

The [United States](#) Department of Education produces an annual report regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students residing in the United States, its districts, and territories (2014**b**A). The four-part report (i.e., Part A, Part B, Part C, and Part D) is released each December to inform government agencies and the public regarding the education of students with disabilities served by IDEA. The data come from several sources including the U.S. Department of Education's *EdFacts* Data Warehouse, Institute of Education Science, Office of Special Education Program's

Regional Source Center, and the U.S. Census Bureau. The report describes progress in four areas: (a) providing individuals with disabilities a free and appropriate education (FAPE); (b) ensuring rights of individuals are protected; (c) assisting states in providing resources for IDEA; and (d) assessing the effectiveness of teaching efforts to educate children with disabilities. Part B of IDEA describes the educational guidelines required for school children ages three through 21. According to their 2014 report, there were 5,823,844 students ages six through 21 under Part B of IDEA making up 8.4% of the total student population for that same age group. Of that almost six million-student population, 94.8% are educated in regular classrooms for 80% or more of the day. That 80% figure is up 10% since 2003 showing more special education students are being served in general education classes than in 2003. It also shows special education students who have exited the program by the time they reach high school have an increased graduation rate by about 10% since 2003. There are fewer special education students served in resource classes or other restricted environments than in 2003.

President George W. Bush created the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education in 2001 in an effort to improve special education. The commission held public hearings over the course of seven months. They heard testimony from 109 expert witnesses and more than 175 parents, teachers, special education students, community members, and other concerned citizens regarding special education in public schools. The commission also read through hundreds of other documents received regarding the condition of special education in the United States. The report generated (Berdine, 2003) is the first comprehensive examination of special education since the enactment of Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2007.

Parents and educators agreed there has been too much bureaucracy that has gotten in the way of quality education for special education students. Parents were disappointed when their child left high school without the skills they needed to be successful at work or higher education. The first recommendation by the commission was to focus more on results than on the process. The second recommendation focused on prevention. Older models for special education waited for a child to fail before intervening. The commission recommended early identification to avoid failure. Because the commission found that the focus on special education was on policy and procedures and not on outcomes, the final recommendation suggested treating special education students as general education students first, ensuring a quality education for all students and focusing less on government compliance. They hoped this focus would create a better education for all students and prepare them for their lives beyond public school.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a way of teaching students that focuses on meeting the needs of students with special education designations in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Inclusion, or mainstreaming as some call it, is the name for classes made up of students with a special education needs, students with other needs not designated as special education, and students designated as general education (meaning they have no requirements for special consideration in conjunction with academic needs). The teaching models for such classes vary greatly from volunteer help for the general education teacher who comes in occasionally to a full-time, certified teacher who works and plans with the general education teacher.

Artiles, Harris-Murri, and Rostenberg (2006) saw the inclusion model as a right for those with disabilities. The authors examined literature on social justice as it applies to inclusion. They argued that denying special education students equal access to education perpetuates their already marginalized social status. They also pointed out the overrepresentation of minorities and males in special education and saw it as a result of cultural differences. The authors called for a complete reform of education with an emphasis on “Transformative Inclusive Education” (p. 267) with an underlying social justice view to try to fix some of the problems that currently exist in the mid-2010s. This model of social justice, according to the authors, examines traditionally held views about difference, advocates for changes in the program’s goals and practices, considers the marginalization of overrepresented groups of students, debunks school culture based on merit, and redistributes resources for more meaningful student engagement.

Lee (2010a) examined the social justice in education and noted that in spite of the intentions of special education to increase academic growth for the disadvantaged, it is not working. Lee conducted interviews during her qualitative case study that examined one middle school in rural New England and had 23 adult volunteer participants including administrators and teachers. She conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants. The author found that even though this middle school tried to implement programs and structures to provide an equity education to all students, the special education classes were not successful and only perpetuated stereotypes. Lee concluded that even when schools focus on social justice and equity in education, “the education system in America is broken...and [has] remained virtually

unchanged since the previous century” (p. 181) and suggested much more dialogue, teacher training, and flexible structures in order to be successful and inclusive.

Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rindaldo (2010) argued that it takes a significant amount of time and planning to serve students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The authors surveyed 71 teachers in the state of New York who teach in inclusion classrooms. There were 26 teachers from suburban districts, 39 from rural communities, and two from urban districts. Of the 71 teachers, 36 respondents worked in elementary schools, five worked in middle schools, and 27 worked in secondary schools. The educational experience of teachers ranged from one to 36 years.

Kilanowski-Press et al. wanted to know about small group instruction, co-teaching, one-to-one instruction, and planning support in the classrooms and were interested in finding out what was effective for teaching special education students in inclusion. The most prevalent type of support (82% or 58 of the 71 teachers) was a consultant teacher with special education experience. Those 58 teachers spent their time in class in various ways. They worked with students in small group settings (17 teachers), worked one-to-one with students (16), planned with the general education teacher (17), and co-taught inclusion classes with the general education teacher (8). The second most prevalent type of support was from volunteers (45 teachers) whereas 15 of the 71 teachers said they received support from teacher assistants. Researchers found the co-teaching model was considered the “most reflective of the principles of inclusion and education in the least restrictive environment” (Kilanoweski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010, p. 53), but was the least used for inclusive instruction in this study.

A qualitative case study was conducted (Freeman, 2014) to determine the effectiveness of the inclusion-teaching model. Freeman (2014) interviewed and observed 18 teachers from one New Jersey high school with at least one year's experience teaching inclusion. A majority of teachers who participated in the study used the *one teach one assist* model for teaching their inclusion classes. Three general themes emerged as findings. The first was that the teachers felt special education students can establish meaningful relationships with other students in inclusion classes. Second, the teachers felt instruction was significantly slowed down in inclusion classes limiting the amount of curriculum taught in those classes. Teachers also revealed they felt they had a greater workload than teachers who taught general education students. This had a negative effect on teacher attitudes about teaching inclusion classes. The final theme was that the teachers felt more professional development and training were needed for teachers who teach inclusion classes. Even though this school was considered a successful inclusion school, Freeman offered a note of concern based on the classroom teachers' challenges teaching inclusion classes.

Fuchs et al. (2015) followed 203 low-performing students in inclusion classrooms over three years, starting in fourth grade. Randomized control trials (RCTs) of two delivery methods for learning fractions were conducted and analyzed. The two forms of delivery were specialized instruction and inclusion instruction. The researchers focused on fractions because they are an essential math skill to master as a foundation for more advanced mathematics. In the three years of the study, 268 students from 53 classrooms in 13 schools comprised the participants in year one. There was some attrition in the later years of the study, with 243 students, 49 classrooms, and 14 schools

participating in year two and 197 students, 45 classrooms, and 14 schools in year three. The students, who ranged from the 9-35 percentiles, were randomly assigned classrooms some of which were inclusion classrooms and some of which offered specialized fraction instruction. Teachers were interviewed and filled out questionnaires over the course of the three-year study while students were given math tests over the same period. The results showed greater gains for those students who were given specialized instruction over those students in inclusion classes. Researchers concluded there is a strong value in specialized instruction over that of inclusion instruction regarding fractions for low-performing students in elementary school.

Co-Teaching Models

It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the benefits of different co-teaching models, yet it is important to understand there are different models. Generally, inclusion classrooms are assigned two teachers. One general education teacher who is trained in the content area of the class and one special education teacher who is trained in teaching special education and who is also trained or who may be highly qualified in the content area of the classes she is assigned. Some inclusion classes do not have a special education teacher who spends time in the classroom. In these cases, students may be assigned as part of the special education teacher's caseload and with whom she checks in during another class period.

The research has identified six different models of co-teaching (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Forbes & Billet, 2012; Hepner & Newman, 2010; Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Sileo, 2011). They consist of *one teach/one observe*, *one teach/one assist*, *parallel teaching*, *team teaching*, *station teaching*, and *alternative*

teaching. Zigmond and Matta (2004) found that of 201 separate observations focused on co-teaching models, only two observations were made where the One Teach/One Assist model was *not* used. Similarly, Keeley (2014) compared these co-teaching models (excluding One Teach/One Observe) by collecting data over a six-week period from 122 junior high school students and nine teachers, four of whom were special education teachers, in a city in the southeastern United States. The teachers, with varying degrees and between six and 30 years of experience, were asked to implement each of the five co-teaching models for two consecutive days. After the two days, teachers and students were given rubrics to fill out about the experience. The study found that most of the participants consistently used the *one teach/one assist* model and did not stray from that model due to the special education teachers' lack of content knowledge. However, Keeley (2014) found that the most effective co-teaching models for student achievement were the *team teaching* and *parallel teaching* models. *Team teaching* is the co-teaching model where both teachers share the responsibility of teaching all students equally. In this model, both teachers plan the lessons, deliver instruction, and help the students. *Parallel teaching* is the co-teaching model that utilizes both teachers for lesson planning, delivery of instruction, and help with all students. However, the class is split into two groups of the same size and the special education teacher instructs one group while the general education teacher or content teacher instructs the other group.

General Education Students in Inclusion Classrooms

The philosophical foundation of the traditional inclusion classrooms is that students with disabilities should be included with their general education peers

(Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008), because the exposure to general education students will help the students with special needs grow socially and emotionally (Stang, 1975). Considering the most appropriate placement for students is an important step in providing services for special education students (Rizza & Morrison, 2003). While there is much debate about whether or not inclusion is the best placement for special education students (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Artiles, Harris-Murri, & Rostenberg, 2006; Gandhi, 2007), there is little consideration if inclusion environments are best for general education students,

Cole, Waldron, and Majd (2004) studied six Indiana elementary school corporations in order to understand the effects of inclusive school settings. They focused on the academic progress of general education students without disabilities and those with mild disabilities in these environments. Using the Basic Academic Skills Sample (BASS), students' academic progress in reading and math in grades 2 through 5 were compared in the fall of 1998 and spring of 1999. These researchers wanted to know if there was any difference in progress made by students with mild disabilities taught in inclusion classrooms compared to students with mild disabilities taught in pullout or resource environments. They were also interested in the academic progress of students with mild disabilities who were taught in resource environments compared to students with no disabilities. In addition, they examined the progress of students without any disabilities who were taught in inclusion classrooms compared to students taught in non-inclusive classrooms.

All students with mild disabilities from 23 elementary schools participated in the study. This resulted in a sample size of 429 students with mild disabilities. Of these

students, 235 were served in special education resource settings where they were not included in classes with general education students; 194 students were taught in 23 different inclusive classrooms. A total of 35 classrooms were randomly selected to obtain students without disabilities to participate in the study. A total of 606 students without disabilities participated in the study with an equal number of students representing grades 2 through 5. These students were given two math probes and three reading probes during a testing time that did not exceed 20 minutes. Results showed students without disabilities taught in inclusion classes made greater academic gains in reading and math when compared to students without disabilities in non-inclusive classrooms. The study also showed that students with mild mental and learning disabilities found small to no significant differences when measuring academic progress.

There were some concerns regarding this study. The authors admitted disappointment in the fact that fewer than half of students with disabilities made as great or greater progress than their non-disabled peers in either the inclusion or non-inclusion setting. Also, according to the data collected, the majority of inclusion students spent their time in resource environments and only 10% of students were in full-time inclusion. While the non-inclusion students had a higher percentage of students at over 56% who spent full-time or part-time in inclusion classes with fewer than 50% of students being taught in resource environments. It seems, according to these numbers, that the non-inclusion schools were actually more inclusive than the inclusive schools.

Ruijs, Van der Veen, and Peetsma (2010) conducted a study in the Netherlands with approximately 55,500 elementary school students with half of them having special

needs. These primary age students were divided into three groups: students in classes with a few special needs students, students in classes with more special education students, and those in classes with no special needs students. All of the students were given achievement tests in language and math classes including non-verbal IQ tests and questionnaires that measured socio-emotional functioning.

Ruijs et al. (2010) found no significant differences in achievement for students without special education needs regardless of the classroom setting. The researchers hypothesized that these students' success may be because they could work independently while teachers helped students with special needs. The study also noted as an explanation for neutral effects of general education students that the lower performing students negated the results of the higher performing students in the same classrooms. The study also stated that there were positive effects regarding social skills for all students, including the higher achieving general education students. Nevertheless there were neutral effects regarding achievement for lower achieving, general education students. The study also found there was a negative effect regarding student achievement if there was a majority of low-achieving students with special education students in the class.

While they concluded inclusion settings had a neutral or positive effect (which included social skills) on general education students overall, it seemed true *only* if there were a large majority of high-achieving students in the inclusion class. They did find the social benefits were positive for all students. The positive effect of inclusion on social skills for all students has been found to be true in other studies as well (Artiles, Harris-Murri, & Rostenberg, 2006). While social skills and acceptance of all students are

important to learn, the current study focuses on the *academic success* of general education students.

Unfortunately, traditional inclusion programs as structured do not seem to be meeting the needs of either group (e.g., Berdine, 2003; Blackorby, Schiller, Knokey, & Wagner, 2007; Redmon, 1995). Some studies show modest gains related to academics for special education students (e.g., Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Cosier et al., 2013; Dessementet, Bless, & Morin, 2012), and there is limited research regarding the effect of traditional inclusion on general education students that indicates they fare about the same as their non-inclusion peers academically (e.g., Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; Dessementet & Bless, 2013; [Sharpe, York, & Knight 1994](#)).

In one case study (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008), a principal and his co-author looked at his own 500-student elementary school to assess the implementation of inclusion after all students were put into general education classrooms. Teachers and staff were placed within inclusion classes to give support to students who needed the support. After three years of fully embracing the inclusion model, this school made gains in reading in all sub-groups reported and went from administering standardized testing to about 50% of their student population to testing 86%. The authors argued that inclusion is a way of thinking and that everyone should be included with no exceptions. They suggested those who do not think inclusion works have not done a good job at implementing it or have not tried for long enough. They also confessed that the changes made at his school were not easy and that the policies and strategies did not always work as intended. There was no mention of data from

other content areas or how this school made inclusion work other than to say they did it by working together. The authors acknowledged the special education students had more of a feeling of belonging and self-confidence, noting major changes in their attitude and demeanor.

Dessementet and Bless (2013) analyzed academic achievement of general education students in Switzerland in three categories: (a) low-performing general education students in inclusion, (b) average-performing general education students in inclusion classes, and (c) high-performing general education students in inclusion classes and students without any special education students in their classes. These researchers wanted to assess the impact of inclusion on general education students. Researchers examined two groups of students in their second year of primary school and were enrolled in one of 80 participating schools.

One group of 202 students was a control group that comprised classrooms of 15-25 students each with no special education students. The other group of 202 students was the experimental group with students in classrooms of 15-25 students each with at least one student with low- or moderate-intellectual disabilities (ID) who spent at least 70% of the time in the inclusion class with four to six hours of classroom support by a special education teacher. An academic achievement test was administered to participants at the beginning and end of the school year. An intelligence test was also administered to participants as a pre-test. The top scoring 25% of students were considered high performing; the lowest 25% were considered low performing leaving the other 50% as average performing. The researchers concluded that there was no difference in academic achievement over the course of one year between the control

group and experimental group. The researchers acknowledged the results of this study may not be applicable to middle school students and results may be different when more than one special education student is included in classrooms (which is often the case in middle school classrooms in the United States).

Another study (McDonnell et al., 2003) focusing on the achievement of general education students and special education students in inclusion classes, was conducted examining 324 students including 14 special education students compared to 221 students in general education classes with no special education students. State-mandated testing in English language arts and math were used to analyze academic growth in these two groups of students. Test results were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) that indicated there was no significant difference in academic performance between the students in inclusion classes and those students not in inclusion classes. In addition, students with special needs made significant gains in adaptive behavior in the inclusion class.

Special Education Students in Inclusion Classrooms

The vast majority of research has focused on achievement of special education students in inclusion classroom settings. Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, and Theoharis (2013) conducted a study in an effort to add to the body of research regarding special education student achievement in general education classes. The researchers wanted to make clear the special education students involved in the study were not only physically in a classroom with general education peers, but that they were given access to general education contexts and they defined inclusion based on that criteria (i.e. special education students in general education classrooms and using the same text

and curriculum as general education students). The researchers studied the relationship between the number of hours spent in general education classrooms and math and reading achievement of 1,300 children ages six to nine from 180 school districts. Cosier et al. (2013) found the more time special education students spent in an inclusion classroom, the better they scored on achievement tests for math and reading with a half point and .37 of a point gain for each hour in math and reading general education classes, respectively. Their findings implied that special education students would benefit from more time spent in inclusion classrooms. Since their study focused on achievement of special education students, they offer no findings about the achievement of regular education students in the same classrooms.

A quantitative study conducted in Switzerland focused on 34 children between the ages of seven or eight years old with intellectual disabilities (ID) who were in inclusion classes and 34 children with ID who went to special schools for children with disabilities (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2011). Researchers wanted to know which group of students with similar IQs and disabilities would make more academic progress based on their educational setting. An initial screening test was given to a group of 134 children in inclusion classes and special schools to find participants who had similar IQs. One outcome of this initial screening exam was children already participating in inclusion classes had a much higher IQ on average. Participants were tested three times over the course of two school years. Parents and teachers also filled out the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System instrument at the beginning of the two-year period and at the end. Students with lower IQs in special schools and students with higher IQs in inclusion were eliminated to create two participant groups with similar IQs.

The results of the study using ANOVAs indicated there was no difference between the two groups of participants in their academic progress in mathematics. There was a significant difference between the progress made between the two groups in literacy skills although the effect size was very small and the actual score difference was slight. The inclusion students made slightly more academic progress than the students in special schools in the area of literacy. The researchers concluded that inclusion is an appropriate alternative for ID students, and that students with ID made academic progress in either setting. This study did not include information on the general education student progress and noted that the ID students were included in math and literacy from 4.3 to 6.3 hours per week as opposed to being in those classes full time. The study did not say what type of instruction was given to ID students or what kind of setting they were in for the other hours of the school week nor did they include what the total number of hours is in a school week for elementary age students.

A case study conducted by Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, and Algozzine (2012) examined the co-teaching model in inclusion classrooms. The authors argued that inclusion was a right for special education students and that including special education students in classes with general education students was simply social justice. Inclusion classes were giving special education students the recognition, caring, and empathy they deserved. The authors pointed out that effective teaching was an important element in inclusion classrooms. They focused on two students, Raul and David, who were special education students in inclusion classes. The authors noted that students in class appreciated when teachers slowed down instruction to meet the

learning needs of the class and modified curriculum for students with special needs.

The findings showed that students with special needs did well in inclusion classrooms.

Ruijs and Peetsma's (2009) meta-analysis focused on the effects of inclusion on special education and general education students. They looked at scientific, international literature on the social-emotional effects and cognitive development of students in inclusion. Quantitative studies were selected based on scientific quality and the use of a control group with pre- and post-tests in the design of the study. Studies on students with severe special needs were excluded.

They categorized their findings into four sections: (a) achievement of students with special educational needs; (b) socio-emotional effects on children with special educational needs; (c) academic effects on the other children in the class; and (d) social effects on the other children in the class. For the first category regarding achievement of students with special needs, researchers concluded that special education students generally did better in inclusion classes while noting that there were vast differences in inclusion classes between studies. Regarding socio-emotional effects on special education students, researchers found mixed results noting that children with special needs were less liked than their peers without special needs in inclusion classes. Researchers found most studies showed neutral effects for academic achievement for general education students in inclusion classes. There were several variables to consider regarding this result, such as high-achieving groups and low-achieving groups in one study would cause a neutral result overall. Finally, the researchers noted very little research in the area of general education students and effects of inclusion on academic achievement and socio-emotional effects. The researchers concluded the

findings were again neutral in this area noting that generally general education students in inclusion classes felt more positive toward their special education peers. However, they were less positive about them than their peers without special needs.

Middle School Students

Middle-school years are important years for many reasons. Research shows that students during this time become increasingly disengaged ([Gibson, 2014](#); Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Ryan and Patrick (2001) studied 233 middle school students focusing on motivation and engagement in their quantitative, longitudinal study. Participants were given surveys to fill out in the spring of seventh and again in the fall of eighth grade. Respondents came from 30 different math classes taught by 15 different math teachers. Students answered questions based on a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = not at all true to 5 = very true). The data showed an increase in self-efficacy from seventh to eighth grade. Being the oldest students in the group seemed to give students more confidence in themselves when compared to students in seventh grade. Eighth-grade students seemed to have more motivation to do well when compared to seventh-grade students. Students also performed better academically and were more engaged in an environment that promoted group interactions, teacher support, and a feeling of belonging. This research showed students were more engaged, more confident, and more academically motivated in eighth grade as compared to seventh grade and when supportive teachers encouraged social interaction with peers.

West and Schwert (2012) investigated the cause of the well-researched sharp decline in academic achievement during the middle school years—often called the middle school plunge. The researchers analyzed Florida Department of Education data

from 2000 to 2009 of students in grades three through 10. Specifically, they looked at test scores of third graders for both math and reading. Then they examined test scores for students entering sixth or seventh grade for both subjects who had been enrolled in the districts in third grade and who had taken state examinations for the years leading up to seventh grade. Researchers found students entering middle school had positive achievement trajectories from third grade only to experience a significant drop in academic achievement in math and reading when students changed schools from elementary to middle school as compared to students who attended K-8 schools. They also found a less severe drop when students changed schools to attend high school whether students came from a middle school or a K-8 school. Researchers concluded students, as a whole, experienced adverse consequences in academics by attending middle schools.

In this quantitative, two-year, longitudinal study, Eccles et al. (1993) examined the impact of the middle school environment on students. These researchers wanted to know if this developmental period was unique in some way that puts this age group at such risk for difficulty. Their sample of 1,500 early adolescents was selected from 12 school districts in Michigan. Participants moving from sixth grade to seventh and from sixth grade to a junior high school filled out questionnaires for the two consecutive school years. They found these students faced a range of challenges such as drug use, arrests, dropping out of school, and illegal consumption of alcohol. Researchers found that “the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral for some individuals, a spiral that leads some adolescents to academic failure and school dropout” (Eccles et al., 1993, p. 90).

The authors looked closely at teaching efficacy in four groups to see if they could determine the cause of this downward spiral. Teacher efficacy was based on years of teaching and self-reporting in a survey. Teachers survey score and years of experience were then combined to categorize them into efficacy levels. The first group of 559 students moved from a high-efficacy sixth-grade math teacher to a low-efficacy math teacher in seventh grade. Another group of 474 adolescents had low-efficacy math teachers both years. The third group of 117 students moved from a low- to a high-efficacy math teacher. Finally, the last group of 179 adolescents had high-efficacy teachers both years. They found the group that moved from a high-efficacy teacher to a low one had lower self-confidence at the end of their junior high school year. They found adolescent, student behavior was predictive of future difficulty and school failure. Researchers also found a disruption in family interactions such as distancing relationships, power struggles, and rebellion to parental authority during adolescence.

Eccles et al. (1993) looked at adolescents who stayed in the same elementary school and those who moved into junior high school at the same age to see if there was a difference in behavior and academic achievement. They found that those students who stayed in elementary school at the same age of those who moved on to a middle school or junior high school had fewer difficulties in school linking adolescent difficulties to school and not simply age. This study also found middle school teachers felt less effective as teachers for low-performing students in middle school. Teachers felt less of a connection with students due to the increased number of students a teacher has in middle school as opposed to elementary school where students are able to bond with one teacher. This feeling was most profound with seventh-grade math teachers.

Students felt less of a connection to teachers, participated in more group work, and had more responsibility for their own learning. These and other factors contributed to student disengagement in middle school (i.e., students' grades drop; they do not participate in school activities; they do not have good, working relationships with their teachers). The authors talk about what they deem "Stage-Environment Fit" (Eccles et al., p.92) where people need to fit in the correct environment in order to be successful. People who need a nurturing environment would not do well. Middle school is a place where there is a mismatch for most adolescents. The authors argued that teachers have a difficult time providing the optimal degree of structure while also providing a challenging environment that encourages development toward higher levels of cognition needed for developmental growth. They concluded that middle school students experienced fewer connections to teachers at a point in their lives developmentally when they need to feel more connected and have closer relationships with adults. For these reasons, adolescents experienced a decline in achievement when they are in junior high school settings.

More recently, Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, and Davis-Kean (2006) reported student engagement shows middle school and high school students have a high level of disengagement. This disengagement leads to low academic achievement and dropping out of school. Wigfield et al. (2006) found that this decline in achievement continues through middle school.

Other research conducted by Lee (2010b) also focused on American student growth trajectory in math and reading over the course of 30 years. Using NAEP long-term trend data for math and reading for students ages 9, 13, and 17 along with national

longitudinal datasets from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the study used weighted least squares time-series regression method and two-rate linear modeling to identify a national average growth projection in math and reading. Similar to the previous research, Lee (2010b) found that students' achievement in these subjects leveled off in middle school showing very little growth over three decades of data collection.

Teacher Attitudes

Several studies explored teacher attitudes about educating special needs students in inclusion classes. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 28 different reports published from 1958 to 1995 regarding teacher attitudes of inclusion classes. The analysis revealed 65% of educators (N=10,500) supported the idea of mainstreaming students and 53% indicated they were willing to teach students with special needs. The analysis identified that about half (50.8%) of general education teachers felt inclusion would provide benefits to students. Special education teachers (n=1,173) had greater confidence (66.6%) that inclusion provided benefits for students. However, all teachers overwhelmingly (81.6%) felt that inclusion would require more work and planning than general education classes. The analysis also revealed that educators felt they had little time and inadequate training to deal with all the issues that accompanies students with special needs. Only about a quarter of teachers felt they had adequate training, preparation time, and resources to teach inclusion classes. Teachers also noted special education students could cause disruption and have behavior issues in inclusion classes with 50% of respondents indicating they feared students with special needs could create classroom problems. The study concluded that

while teachers say they support the idea of teaching inclusion classes, the reality is they felt ill-prepared, unsupported, and that special education students would create problems in classrooms that would inhibit the learning of other students. While the information from this analysis is dated, it serves to show longitudinal consistency about attitudes of teachers participating in inclusion/mainstreaming.

Cook, Tankersley, Cook, Lysandra, and Landrum (2000) surveyed 70 general education teachers from six Ohio school districts. Initially, superintendents nominated schools that they identified as their most highly inclusive elementary schools and nine principals agreed to include their schools as participants. The researchers identified four different types of teacher perceptions regarding their students. Students seemed to fit into one of four categories based on teacher interaction and attitude toward them: attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. Students categorized as *attachment*, felt personally connected to their teachers. Students in the *concern* category caused teachers to worry about them because of their underperformance academically. Teachers showed a lack of caring for *indifferent* students and offered them little help. And, finally, *rejection* students were students who teachers felt were beyond help. All 70 general education teachers were surveyed during staff meetings where they were asked to respond to four prompts nominating three students for each category (e.g., indifferent, rejection). The study found that the success of students was directly associated with the attitude of the teacher. The co-teachers or special education teachers who taught with the general education teacher were not considered in this study. Using a chi-square analysis, the results showed an over-representation for the concern and rejection categories on the surveys. Students with disabilities in inclusion

classes represented about 13% of the participating student population. Only 5% of students in the attachment category were inclusion students with disabilities compared to over 30% represented in each of the concern and rejection categories. There was an overrepresentation of students with special needs in the rejection and concern categories. Cook et al. concluded that teachers in inclusion settings have concerns about how successful special education students can be in inclusion settings. Thus, research seems to indicate that teachers are accepting of the idea of inclusion classes in theory, but feel unsupported and unprepared to teach them. Further, not surprisingly, teachers' attitudes about their students and what they can or cannot learn are important to student success.

Teacher attitudes are already developed before they begin teaching. In a quantitative study, Rizza and Morrison (2003) surveyed pre-service teachers in graduate and undergraduate programs in Colorado and Indiana. The convenience sample included 33 graduate and 59 undergraduate teachers. Researchers wanted to know if pre-service teachers could identify students with emotional disabilities and students considered gifted based on certain characteristics. They also wanted to know if graduate students were better able to identify students' needs based on behavior. Participants were asked to fill out a survey to categorize behaviors and characteristics exhibited by students. Participants could rank behaviors of students in one of three categories: gifted, emotionally disturbed, or both. Researchers found graduate students were better at correctly categorizing students. They also found that stereotypes played a role in categorizing students. While many of the characteristics on the survey applied to both gifted and emotionally disturbed students, most teachers attributed negative

behavior to students identified as emotionally disturbed. Graduate students attributed behaviors to the both category more often. Since teachers are often instrumental in the placement of students in gifted programs and consideration for special education services, it is important to realize that education programs may not prepare teachers to recognize behaviors associated with gifted students versus special education students. It is also important to realize that stereotypes have an influence on how teachers perceive students.

Theory

Vygotsky's social learning theory contends that social interactions that occur in the classroom are an essential part of gaining knowledge (Powell & Kalina, 2009). One of the primary concepts associated with this theory is the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) (Shayer, 2003). Vygotsky argued that the ZPD is the zone teachers want to aim for when presenting material. Gauvain and Cole (1997) defined it as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in the collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 33). If instruction is far above the students' ZPD, it leads to their frustration. The student is lost and finds it difficult to master the information. If instruction is below the students' ZPD, there is no learning taking place, because they know the material. Further, Shayer (2003) pointed out that children learning in their ZPD are often transported to the next level of understanding by internalizing what they see peers do that might be at a slightly higher level or at the top of their ZPD. Thus, learning can take place with students at any point within their ZPD as they interact and learn from each other.

This concept is related to Vygotsky's idea of the *more knowledgeable other* (MKO) (Beaumie, 2006). The MKO can be in the form of a teacher, parent, or peer who is academically more advanced. Beaumie (2006) gave the example of struggling students in math class being assigned a peer tutor to help them with their math. The peer is the MKO and the struggling student learns in this social environment by watching her peer and listening to her explain how to do the math problem. Eventually, the struggling student becomes the MKO and the peer tutor is not needed. Without the MKO, learning is stagnant (Beaumie).

Powell and Kalina (2009) discussed this concept in the classroom and the benefits of student collaborations because it builds on students' prior knowledge gained from earlier instruction or experiences. As students work together and observe one another, they might see another student doing something just beyond what they can do and learning is constructed. Students collaborate and share ideas with each other to learn new material. The researchers believed social learning was the best way to gain knowledge. For example, in a math class, one student successfully adds two numbers together. He struggles adding three numbers together until he observes a peer who can do this. Using his prior knowledge of adding two numbers and with his observation of a more advanced peer, the student learns he too can add three numbers.

However, Smagorinsky (2007) noted that Vygotsky's theory was more about what students bring with them *to the classroom* than what they learn in it by working in small groups. The researcher pointed out that Vygotsky explored the idea that learning is social, but that knowledge often is connected to culture and environment. He argued that students are often punished or ridiculed in school for acting in ways they have

come to see as normal. Smagorinsky cited the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education and disciplinary situations as evidence of this bias. Their learned behavior from social learning is different from the expectations by a White dominant culture in public school. The study gave examples of social norms associated with some Black churches where attendees are expected to participate in the service to show their support. They yell out and make gestures as they participate to demonstrate their devotion and level of engagement. Conversely, White churches may be relatively solemn and quiet to show respect and devotion. Since most schools are predominantly White as far as administration and teachers, the social norms may not match Black students. This may have some relevance in respect to special education students in inclusion classes. If special education students are used to relying on more help, shouting out if they need something, or focusing on their own needs and not on those of the group their behavior may be seen as disruptive to teachers and other students.

Vygotskaya (1999) examined Vygotsky's work regarding children with special needs. She posited that Vygotsky contended that a child's disability not only separated them physically but socially from their able-bodied peers. This social disconnection occurs because they may have been educated in classrooms that were isolated from non-disabled children, and/or they were not accepted socially because of the disability. She concluded that this segregated approach to education needed to change for children with disabilities. For these reasons, Vygotsky's work became the foundation for applied special education.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I have presented research supporting the implementation of inclusion classes and the challenges associated with it. Further, previous research revealed that while teachers support inclusion classes, in theory, they also admitted to a lack of training and support leaving them feeling overwhelmed with the work of teaching inclusion. Finally, the review exposed a gap in the research. Most inclusion research focused on students in elementary school and not those in middle school, who face numerous academic and social challenges. Therefore, this study explores the perceptions of middle school teachers who teach students in inclusion classrooms to gain a better understanding of the experience in these critical years.

In the next chapter, I present my methodology including my research design, an introduction to my participants, and my efforts to ensure trustworthy findings.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A qualitative research study was conducted to gather information about what teachers perceive is the impact of traditional inclusion environments on general education students' academic success. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is a tool used to get as close as possible to the participants and better understand their experiences. He also points out that qualitative research studies things in their natural environment and from the people who give meaning to what they are doing. This method of research allows participants to share their experiences about teaching general education students in inclusion classes and to assign meaning to what is happening in those classrooms. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers in inclusion classrooms perceive the traditional inclusion model's efficacy in meeting the academic needs of general education students?
2. How useful is Social Learning Theory in understanding how traditional inclusion works for general education students?
3. What else was revealed about the traditional inclusion classroom model and general education students?

Site

The site for this study is one academically successful public middle school, identified for the purposes of this study by the pseudonym, Green Valley Middle School. I decided to focus on a school that is considered academically successful to eliminate distractors. Teachers in low-performing schools may be focused on remediation and

often have pressure from administrators to improve student performance. There are also many factors that directly affect low socio-economic students, which can interfere with their performance such as hunger and difficult living conditions. Such variables may affect the experiences and perceptions of teachers as well. I believe by conducting interviews at a successful school with few free and reduced lunch students, it may be more likely that teachers would observe and communicate their feelings about teaching inclusion and how it is working for students. A successful school may give a clearer view of the inclusion model and teachers' perceptions of it without having to sift through other challenges with which the school may be dealing.

I chose a school district in an average-sized suburban city in Texas that has consistently been one of the top 25 performing school districts in the state. The school district is located in northeastern Texas near a large metropolitan area. It is rated as *recognized* for the state performance ratings³ for all schools. Whites and Asian students are slightly overrepresented within the school while African Americans and Latinos are slightly underrepresented in comparison to the district. (See district and school demographics in Table 3.1).

³ Ratings are based on annual standardized test scores, attendance, drop out rates, and graduation rates.)

Table 3.1

School and District Demographics

	District	Green Valley Middle School
African American	9.4%	7.5%
Hispanic	27.5%	19%
White	47.9%	57.4%
Asian	11.7%	13.6%
Special Education	9.6%	9.2%
Enrollment	52,801	904

Note. Information comes from Texas Education Association, 2014

I chose to focus on middle school students because most of the research on inclusion and its effects on general education students has been based on elementary school students (Cook et al., 2000; Cosier et al., 2013). In elementary school, the class sizes are small and the ratio of general education student to special education student is quite low. Both of these variables increase in middle school. Secondly, middle school years are pivotal years for academic and social development and how they relate to a student's motivation for academic success (Ryan, 2001).

I chose this particular middle school due to the high number of special education students at the school and its reputation in the district for meeting the needs of these students in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, this school's enrollment was 936 students

in 2013⁴ and had a special education population of 9.2% (this percentage does not include students with *504 plans*, which is typical for nationally reported data. See definitions of key terms in Appendix C). I am an eighth-grade English teacher at this school, which made access to teachers easier especially in regards to the follow-up, one-legged interviews.

Data Collection

After the University of Texas at Arlington granted IRB approval, I requested permission to conduct research from the district. District approval was granted and official documentation granting permission was sent to me. (See Appendices G, H, and I for approvals.)

Interviews I used purposeful sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) in the selection of teachers for the study. I focused on core classes because they are required and the school has national and local testing data on these classes. It is also a year that includes writing in state testing. Specifically, I selected seventh-grade teachers, because their students have had some experience with middle school and, therefore, are more likely to feel comfortable with the logistics and demands associated with it. I sent email invitations to 10 teachers with experience teaching inclusion (i.e., three math teachers, two science teachers⁵, two English language arts teacher, and three special education teachers) at Green Valley Middle School requesting their participation in my research. My goal was to interview a wide range of teachers to collect “multiple realities” (Creswell, 1998, p. 21) to better understand the inclusion classroom experience more fully, irrespective of subject area.

⁴ This are the most recently reported statistics.

⁵ Math and Science have only two teachers for the seventh grade.

After hearing from the teachers, I developed criteria for inclusion. These requirements were that the teachers had at least one year of experience teaching inclusion and were currently teaching these classes. Of the three seventh-grade math teachers, only one math teacher was responsible for teaching all the inclusion classes. She agreed to participate. There was also only one seventh-grade English language arts (ELA) teacher who taught the inclusion classes. The other ELA teacher contacted had not taught inclusion for over 10 years, so she was eliminated as a candidate. Both science teachers and all three special education teachers contacted agreed to participate in the research and met the requirements set forth making seven participants in all.

One-on-one interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing (e.g., in their classroom, in my classroom, or in the teachers' lounge). The interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix A for interview protocol), which allowed me to collect rich data and gain a deeper understanding of the topic of inclusion (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Interviews took about 40 minutes on average. In each instance, I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them verbatim the evening of the interviews. The transcripts were identified by a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants. I sent the completed transcripts to each participant with a request to read over his or her interview to make sure I captured what he or she wanted to say. I asked them to send me any corrections or additions. Two participants made minor corrections or additions to their transcript. One participant wanted to clarify some minor information she gave about teaching (she wanted me to know that in spite of all the challenges, she loves

teaching) and the other wanted to add some clarifying information about inclusion and had a question about the name changes I made to protect participant identity.

In total, participants consisted of four content, general education teachers and three special education teachers. (See Table 2 for participant demographics.) Six of the seven teachers were women with between three and 36 years of classroom experience. The general education teachers were Christine, an English language arts and reading teacher; Debbie and Emily both science teachers; and Gwen, a math teacher. The other participants were Alicia, a special education teacher and department head; Brent, a special education teacher and coach; and Fran, a special education teacher.

Table 3.2

Participant Demographics

Teacher pseudonym	Subject Taught	Title	Years of Experience	Years taught Inclusion	Degrees Certificates
Alicia	English 8 Inclusion, Science 6 Inclusion	Special Education Teacher	36 years of teaching special education	36	Bachelor's degree in special education, Master's degree in elementary education.
Brent	Math 7 Inclusion, Social Studies 8 Inclusion	Special Education Teacher and Coach	12 years of teaching special education	12	K-12 PE teaching certificate, 4 – 8 Generalist degree.
Christine	English Language Arts Inclusion 7	English Language Arts and Reading Teacher	10 years of teaching experience	9	Lifetime elementary generalist grades 1-8 certificate, a reading specialization certificate, ESL supplemental certificate
Debbie	Science 7 Inclusion, PreAP, general ed	Science Teacher	7 years of teaching middle school science	7	Science teaching degree
Emily	Science 7 Inclusion, PreAP, general ed	Science Teacher	12 years of teaching middle school science	7	Science teaching degree
Fran	English 7 Inclusion	Special Education Teacher	12 years of teaching experience	7	EC-12 special education certificate, 6-12 English Language Arts and Reading certificate, and 6-8 math Certificate
Gwen	Math 7 Inclusion and general ed	Math teacher	3 years of teaching experience	4 1/2	4-8 generalist certificate, 4-8 math certificate

Observations and one-legged conferences. I conducted eight classroom observations, two for each general education teacher with their special education teacher or teacher's aide. I observed the same classes on two different days over a two-week period in order to gain a better understanding of what was going on in the classrooms (Gall et al.). Two classroom observations helped me understand classroom dynamics better than a single observation might and helped to ensure "rigorous data collection" (Creswell, 1997, p. 20). Observing all three subject-area classrooms allowed me to see some of the same students in different settings to give a more complete picture of inclusion classes.

My role was that of a "complete observer" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 277) as I positioned myself in order to view all that was going on and yet be out of the way. A complete observer is one who does not interact or insert herself in the situation being observed (Gall et al., 2007). My goal through the observations was to see how science, math, and English language arts teachers spent their time in the classroom and with which students. I took detailed notes during the observations in regards to the setting, the class topic, what was covered in the planned lesson, and the number of students in class who received help from a teacher. I also made seating charts with the help of the teacher and asked them to indicate which students were general education students to aid my classroom observations. I noted that the average inclusion class size was 30 students⁶. Just over half of the students in each class were general education students making it a very high special education to general education student ratio. This is a very

⁶ The average regular class size according to the counselors is about 22 students.

large class size with quite a large special education student population. I used the charts to capture teacher interactions with students and students' actions and reactions. A table (see Appendix B) was filled in during observations to track where teacher(s) spent her/his time and what was done.

In addition, I conducted at least two one-legged conferences with each teacher following the observations (Hord & Hall, 1987). One-legged interviews are quick probes that allowed me an opportunity to capture the teachers' thoughts and feelings about what was happening in their classes without taking up a great deal of time. These impromptu probes followed an observation and occurred in the teacher's classroom, an office, or in the hallway. Generally, I would simply stop by a classroom or see a participant in the hallway and ask, "How are things going since I was here last?" or something of that nature. The informal nature of one-legged interviews promoted more candid responses. Their brevity also allowed the opportunity for several discussions over time that might not be practical due to time requirements if the traditional interview model was used where the researcher sits down for an extended period of time with a protocol. For example, after observing one class session, I conducted my first one-legged interview with a special education teacher to clarify what differentiates an inclusion class from a special education class.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews and observations were chunked and coded (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005) and reviewed numerous times to see what patterns emerged. As I read the transcripts of each interview, I coded information and made notes in the margins about the codes. As I re-read the transcripts, I focused on

individual lines and phrases and then clustered related codes into larger thematic categories ([Creswell, 2013](#)). Each of these themes were assigned a color. The color-coding helped provide a visual marker for each theme. Some of the themes I used were: how teaching is done, teaching methods, teaching philosophy, training, professional development, experience, planning time, lesson planning, meeting the needs of students, and general education students.

I used Social Learning Theory as a lens to understand how the themes identified in the transcripts may be related to this concept and to help me understand the teachers' perceptions of the general education students' academic and social growth in inclusion settings. Using this lens helped me see areas of social learning that were brought up by teachers during their interviews such as peers helping each other, peers teaching each other, and peers learning from each other. This theory helped highlight specific actions going on in inclusion classes. During observations I watched for evidence of social learning going on in classrooms. I looked for students working in groups, students helping each other, and students who quietly observed others in an effort to understand instructions.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, qualitative research is not generalizable, so this study reflects the views of a small number of participants. The experiences of other teachers in inclusive classrooms may be very different. Rather, the goal of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of inclusion at this particular school with these students. The information gleaned from this investigation provided

valuable insights into the experience of general education students in inclusion, that to date had not received much attention.

Second, my focus was on the teachers' perspectives, not only because of the limited amount of research on inclusion in middle school, but also because they are adults. The consent process is much quicker with adult participants. Although student views would be a valuable addition to better understand the entire inclusion experience, they would require parental approval, which would have made it difficult to complete under the time constraints of the school year.

Third, I have also not included any research about pre-service teacher training or research about the effectiveness of different co-teaching models. The method of delivery using different co-teaching models as well as the relationship of the teachers who work together could also affect the outcomes of research, but these have already been the subjects of a vast amount of research.

Fourth, while I did my best not to disrupt the flow of the classroom when I observed, I was aware that my presence had an influence on the actions of teachers and students in the classroom. However, regardless of this effect, the observations did provide an opportunity to place the teachers' comments in context. Further, the use of one-legged conferences allowed me to get feedback about the classroom observations from the teachers' perspectives.

Fifth, during the interview process it became clear that paraprofessionals play a supportive role in the inclusion classroom. While these teachers' aides were present during my classroom observations, I chose not to revise my research plan to include

them in the interview process and, therefore, focused exclusively on the teachers' perceptions.

Finally, I have been involved in research in this area prior to this particular study, I have worked with educators and in schools for many years, and I work at the school where I conducted this study. I taught seventh grade with some of these teachers for one year and then moved to eighth grade. Fran and I taught an inclusion class together and I worked with Alicia in another inclusion class during that year of teaching seventh grade. It was my first of four years teaching at Green Valley Middle School, so I did not have any relationships with the teachers at the school beyond working with them. When I taught eighth grade, I had little interaction with the seventh-grade teachers. The teachers I worked with were aware that my research interests were about special education and inclusion; however I do not think they were aware of any specific thoughts or feelings about inclusion. Therefore, it is possible that my association with them and the school may create bias. However, my exposure to these teachers was very limited since I have been at this school. Further, my background and employment may help me feel at ease with educators and them with me allowing them to be more open with their views. In the next section I will explain my efforts to ensure my findings are credible in spite of these personal connections.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Maxwell (2005) suggested several ways to rule out validity threats in qualitative research and make it more credible. First, I collected "rich data" (Maxwell, 2005 p. 110) through interviews and observations. I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with each participant as well as two classroom observations for one math,

one ELA, and two science classrooms, and conducted at least two one-legged follow-up interviews with all seven participants after the observations. Multiple data sources provide a fuller picture of what is happening (Maxwell). This triangulation of the data provided evidence to support my conclusions, interpretations, and observations (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell).

Second, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, I requested feedback through member checks by having the teachers I interviewed read their transcripts to ensure my transcription of their words was accurate (Bryman, 1988). This allowed respondents to give additional, clarifying information, if necessary. Two of the teachers did make slight alterations to their transcripts or asked for some clarifications.

Third, I used peer checks to help guard against any potential biases. A student in my doctoral cohort read my already-coded transcripts, so she could concur or revise my codes. After reviewing the transcripts, she agreed with the coding I had done and offered no additional suggestions for changes.

In summary, the nature of qualitative research is to look beyond the numbers offered in quantitative research. It gives a voice to participants and while the results are not generalizable, they give a deeper understanding of what is going on in inclusion classes in this particular school at this time. Every effort has been made to ensure trustworthiness regarding the collection, analysis, and findings that follow in this research study.

In this chapter I have provided details regarding the design of my study and details about the participants. I have also discussed the methods of analysis. In the

following chapter, I will offer my findings and discussion about the connections to previous literature.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, using the lens of social learning theory, I present the findings of my exploration into the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding inclusion and the experience of general education students in inclusion classrooms. Specifically, I focus on the inclusion model, broadly, as it is employed at Green Valley Middle School, challenges of inclusion, class planning, the effectiveness of inclusion, and student modeling with discussion about how elements of inclusion connect with Vygotsky's social learning theory and the *zone of proximal development*.

The Inclusion Model

Green Valley Middle School had a large special education population and uses the co-teaching model of *One Teach One Assist* in all of its inclusion classes, which Keeley (2014) identified as the most frequently used of the six co-teaching models identified in literature (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Forbes & Billet, 2012; Hepner & Newman, 2010; Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Sileo, 2011). In this approach, the general education or content teacher did the teaching while the special education teacher or aide addressed the needs of all students in the classroom. The special education teacher may occasionally also take small groups out of the classroom for re-teaching or testing in some instances.

Ideally, inclusion should help all students progress academically. Special education students have an Individualized Education Program⁷ (IEP) in place to help level the playing field so they can perform at or near the same level of their general

⁷ Every special education student must have an IEP. It is an educational plan written to meet individual student needs.

education peers. There are more general education students in inclusion classes and yet it seemed many participants felt inclusion classes focused on the needs of special education students. As Debbie, a science teacher, illustrated:

[Inclusion is] special ed students, with various disabilities, or different abilities, are included in the classroom. I'm in there to support them and make sure their needs are being met and make sure they can access content and also to work on any deficits they might have.

In fact, in every interview, both special education and general education teachers, referred to special education students placed in inclusion classes as inclusion students. Even though there are more general education students in inclusion classes, the general education students were not referred to as inclusion students, only the special education students. Further, the teachers' goals were focused on this population's success.

Benefits of Inclusion Classrooms

Although the teachers held mixed views about how the teaching model works at Green Valley, several participants identified a number of benefits associated with inclusion. One of the primary advantages was the notion that inclusion is important for the development, learning, and self-esteem of the special education student. Researchers (Cosier et al., 2013) found these benefits in their studies focused on special education students as well. For example, Alicia, a special education teacher, felt it was important to keep special education students in general education settings instead of isolating them in special education classrooms. She said,

Overall I...I do like [inclusion] as far as keeping the kids with their peers. They don't feel so different. Some of [the students] don't like to leave the classroom. They feel, you know, weird doing that.

Similarly, the revolutionary work of Vygotsky and his social learning theory suggested children with disabilities needed to be educated with their peers (Vygodskaya, 1999) in an effort to remove the physical and psychological separation often experienced by special needs children as a result of their disability. His theory implored educators to expose special education children to their peers so they could learn from each other. More contemporary researchers agreed (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008).

Brent, a special education teacher, also spoke of the benefits he felt special education students get from inclusion classes. He stated,

I think [inclusion] benefits the [special education] kids because every child wants to feel like they have a place at the table. They don't want to be viewed differently. They don't want to be taught differently. They want to be with their peers. They want to be in with their friends. They just want that opportunity. And, so I think I probably agree with [using] the inclusion model as opposed to [pulling special education students out of the general education class for instruction].

Thus, these teachers felt that inclusion connected the special education students with their peers instead of making them feel like outcasts.

Alicia, another special education teacher, added that the special education students are not the only ones who benefit:

A lot of gen ed students get support that they need [in inclusion classes.] Yes, the [special education] students are my key, and they're the ones I look after first, but I'm also working with all students.

These teachers thought the model helped because there were two adults in the room. As Alicia stated succinctly, "It cuts the teacher student ratio down in half."

Several of the other teachers also talked about the inherent advantage gained by having two adults in the room to help all students. Gwen, a math teacher, stated, "I've been lucky that my inclusion teacher is awesome. He helps everybody. We see someone struggling, we work with them all." Alicia noted that their different backgrounds proved advantageous to the students as well. She explained, "I think there's a lot of benefits to [having two teachers in the room], because I'm looking at something different than the gen ed teacher is." She also pointed out the advantage for general education students who struggle academically but are not designated special education. She added,

A lot of gen ed students get support that they need. They're not low enough in an area to qualify for special education or be a 504 student. Sometimes they need support too. And, so because I am walking around the room...those non-[special education] kids can also get some extra support that they wouldn't have.

During my observations of the math and English classes, I witnessed how the two teachers worked in unison. Although the content teacher did all of the teaching and gave most of the instruction, the special education teacher was in the classroom for most of the class time. Both of them circulated around the room and helped students who needed it.

The advantages did not end there, however. The special education teachers believed that the inherent makeup of an inclusion classroom could lead general education students to gain a feeling of empathy for their special education classmates. They felt this was the most important thing students could learn from each other. As Brent explained,

...there's a life lesson in there for some of these [general ed] kids and to know that not everybody learns the same and learning can be difficult for [special education] kids. Hopefully they [the general education students] can develop an appreciation and some empathy for [the special education] kids.

Conversely, Fran, a special education teacher, mentioned that the special education students might gain some academic confidence from being with general education students. She said,

We pair [general education students] up with special education student they don't necessarily know that it's a special education student and we give [special education students] the opportunity to feel a little more confident.

Another benefit of inclusion mentioned by Gwen was the opportunity for students to work together. She had students work in pairs or groups frequently, so they could help each other. Vygotsky's theory of social learning (Vygotskaya, 1999) would support this collaboration as the best way to learn. Gwen, a math teacher, said, "I like to pair up students and pair up a high student with a high inclusion student." Fran, a special education teacher, added that the general education students could learn by editing papers for the special education students. She thought the peer editing provided them, "a good review ...if they do know the content...that's really helpful."

According to participants at Green Valley, inclusion offers some social benefits such as gaining self-confidence, self-esteem, and empathy for others for both special education and general education students. As Freeman (2014) suggested that students can establish meaningful relationships in inclusion classes. Further, both groups of students get help and academic support from having two adults in the room for at least some of the inclusion class period.

Challenges of Inclusion Classrooms

Several of the teachers voiced concerns about inclusion classes ranging from the limited time and lack of training of the special education staff to the pace of instruction, and student behavioral issues. In this section, I cover the challenges with staffing.

Placement and class size Two of the concerns about inclusion are class size and student placement (Carpenter & Allan, 2007). At Green Valley Middle School, teachers are not consulted about placement in inclusion classrooms. These decisions are made by administration in consultation with the special education department head. Because there are two teachers or a teacher and an aide in most inclusion models, administrators place more students in inclusion classrooms. However, there are sometimes issues regarding placement at Green Valley where there may be too many special education students in the classroom. According to IDEA, an inclusion class must have more general education students than special education students in order to qualify as an inclusion class. Once that threshold is crossed, the class is then considered a special education class. At Green Valley, students were put in and taken out until there were fewer special education students than general education students. Debbie, a science teacher, said, “We have rearranged my classes two and three times,

because there's too many special ed kids in there."Therefore, at Green Valley it is an issue that the class makeup may undergo multiple changes in the early weeks of a term.

The teachers who participated in this study also felt frustrated that these challenging classes had so many students to help. Christine, an English language arts teacher said, "The number [of students in inclusion classes] is too high...It becomes near to impossible to really to be able to devote your attention [to teaching]." While this can be an issue in any class, it was particularly an issue in inclusion classes where students may need help beyond that of general education students. Carpenter and Allan, (2007) also noted that class size for inclusion classes was something that needed particular attention.

Emily, a science teacher, also had some concerns about the number of students in her inclusion classes. She said,

I'm sorry, when you have 30 or 28 kids in a class, there's no way to just stop and say...let me just help this side over here while this side is doing what they're supposed to be doing. It doesn't work. This group over here, the regular ed students, they have 100 questions too. [The ratio of] one to 28 with inclusion kids, it just doesn't work out. I know they want to believe that [it does], but it doesn't.

One teacher in particular was very frustrated with the placement of students in inclusion classes. Debbie, the other science teacher, suggested, "I am a firm believer...they need to have a science resource class where there are how ever many teachers they need in there." She also explained that parents are putting general

education students in PreAP classes to avoid them having to be in inclusion classes.

Debbie said,

I believe the reason why [parents are putting their average students in PreAP classes] is because...parents don't want their kid in an inclusion class. And, if they are put in a regular class, it's highly likely they're going to be in an inclusion class. So, they don't want them to have to mess with that riff raff, so they put them in PreAP."

Debbie was referring to parent comments she had received about not wanting their students to be in inclusion classes, which they perceive as offering an inferior education. Parents know that if they do not put their child into an advanced class, they are likely to be placed in inclusion classes. At Green Valley Middle School, parents can put their children into PreAP classes without any testing or proof that they are academically advanced. This creates a problem in that gifted classes get filled with students who are not academically gifted, often leaving few general education students to fill inclusion classes.

She struggled to understand the academic range and expectations for students in her classes. Debbie was concerned about everyone in her class getting the education they deserved. She explained,

This is something that just totally pissed me off last year. At the end of the year, you know one of the special ed people said to me..."Don't forget that [the special education students] not going to graduate with the same certificate that the [general education] kids are." ...If they're not going to graduate at the same level as everybody else in this class, then why in the hell are they in here and why am

I trying to teach them at the same level I'm teaching [the general education] kids that are going to graduate with this degree? It's ridiculous!

Debbie's frustration stems from the lack of resource classes available for science that would support students who are several grade levels below their grade. Currently, students with limited academic ability who are in resource classes for most of the day are put in with general education students for science and social studies classes.

In a follow-up interview regarding inclusion student placement, Alicia explained that an inclusion class is not supposed to be the answer for all special education students. She said this about the placement of students in inclusion classes,

An inclusion classroom shouldn't be everything from low [performing students] to high [performing students] for [special ed or general ed students]. I would love it if we could pick a little bit better the [classroom] group.

While there may be some emotional benefits to inclusion and help from two adults in the classroom, the placement and large classes make teaching inclusion difficult. The teachers mentioned other challenges as well, such as the lack of planning time and training, slower pace, and behavior issues as some of the things they deal with when teaching inclusion classes.

Lack of time. One form of support in the inclusion classroom comes from the addition of the second teacher or aide (Kilanoweski-Press et al., 2010). However, though there were examples of this model working at Green Valley, several of the teachers complained that, in reality, the special education teachers and aides were often not available. They might be called out to help cover other classes or serve as a substitute if there was an emergency. They might also be attending campus and district

meetings or helping with testing. Sometimes general education teachers did not know where the special education support was. Even if the special education teachers or aides were in the school, their time in the classroom was driven by the number of minutes per week of support required as outlined in each student's IEP, so they were not required to be in a class for the entire period each day.

As a result, in some instances, the students lacked the support of both the special education staff and the content teachers in the classroom. For example, the science teachers struggled to understand how students who needed 100% support for their English classes in the form of resource classes where they were taught with as few as six students were then supposed to function in a science class that required mastery of a difficult vocabulary and concepts with only one teacher in the class. Emily and Debbie, two general education science teachers, observed that their special education aides were covering two classes at the same time. Emily explained, "They [the special education support] only come for a little bit and then they have to leave. So, they're not there the whole time to help those kids. She was quick to point out that it is not always her aide's fault. She mentioned that the administrators sometimes thought of special education teachers and aides as *extra* teachers, so they may be pulled to cover other classes or help out in other areas. As a result, the general education teachers may only have had a special education aide for part of a class period, by design.

At other times, the content teachers noted that their aides did not show up at all. Christine shared, "On block days [the special education teacher] is not with me at all during 2nd period. She is with another teacher." Debbie added, "There's not enough special education help. They split their time between two teachers in one class period."

Emily explained that the problem is exacerbated because “you have so many [students] in class and you don’t have an extra teacher in there, or they come in for 30 minutes.” She pointed out that their students did not suddenly understand the lesson or behave better when the special education support left. She stated simply, “I mean, [inclusion] [at Green Valley] is a disaster. It really is, and it’s a total injustice.” Social learning theory, specifically concerning the ZPD (Shayer, 2003), would conclude there is too wide a range of Zones in the science classroom with too few more knowledgeable others to facilitate learning.

During classroom observations, I noticed the special education aides came to class late and left early. When they came in, it took them a few minutes to figure out what students were working on before they could be of any help. Then, they were able to help many of the students until they had to go, once again, to cover other classes.

More of the general education teachers who participated in this study also mentioned the special education staff were not always helpful when they were in the classroom because they may be working on other things when they were supposed to be helping students. Gwen, a math teacher, described one special education teacher in her classroom;

She just sat back there on the computer in the back of the room and didn’t do anything. She didn’t actually help. She didn’t help the students. She just always said she was working on paperwork. The only time she ever came off the computer was when administration came in.

During the classroom observations, in all cases, teachers and aides spent the least amount of time helping general education students as evidenced using seating

charts where general education students were marked. Teachers and aides walked around to all students in all classes, but rarely were able to get to all the students who had their hands up. I witnessed this lack of help during my science classroom observations. I noted that several students had their hands up so long with no response that they finally just put their hands down. One student mumbled under his breath the entire time that he did not understand what he was supposed to be doing. He finally just threw his papers down and gave up. A special education aide did come by and try to help him briefly, but the student continued to say that he did not understand. In the same science class, a group of general education students finished a class assignment quickly. They spent the rest of the class period reading or playing on their iPads. Thus, support from special education teachers and aides is an important part of inclusion, however for various reasons, at Green Valley some students do not receive the support they need leaving the general education teachers to try and meet the needs of all students in inclusion classes..

Training. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) and Freeman (2014) found a lack of training was an issue in inclusion classrooms. This was also an issue at Green Valley. One of the things mentioned more than once by the teachers was the lack of knowledge the special education staff had about teaching in general but more importantly about the content area they are supposed to be supporting. Christine, ELA teacher, mentioned the special education teacher in her classes was unprepared to assist the students. She said, “[Fran] hasn’t been to any training on [close reading strategies]. She has given students wrong answers.” Similarly, Gwen, the math teacher, mentioned that she

worked with a special education teacher one year who “was enthusiastic and positive and that helped the students, but she didn’t have the [math] background.”

Emily, the science teacher, voiced concern about the special education staff’s lack of training in content areas and teaching. She stated, “They’re great people...They are willing to help. They don’t know how to help. They just don’t have the training.”

Emily and Debbie, both science teachers, noted that their support was the least trained to help these students. When approached with these concerns, Alicia, the special education department head, said they simply did not have the “manpower” to cover the needs of the large population of special education students. She did point out that what they were doing was within the confines of the law. Neither special education teachers nor special education aides are required to have content-area training. However, Alicia admitted inclusion at Green Valley was not meeting the needs of either the special education students or the general education students.

The inclusion model was set up to have two teachers helping all the students in an inclusion classroom. Working together, the two teachers could plan together, divide grading and paperwork responsibilities, and help meet the needs of all learners in the classroom. It takes two teachers working together with a smaller group of students to meet the special needs of students in inclusion classrooms along with special training in how best to work with students who have learning disabilities and behavior issues (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). However, at Green Valley Middle School, the special education teacher or aide was often viewed as an *extra* teacher or just a helper who did not need as much training as the general education teacher. As a result, the inclusion

model broke down, teachers got frustrated, and students did not get the help they needed.

Therefore, for many of these teachers, the assistance from the special education teacher or aide was illusory because they were not always in the classroom or because they lacked content knowledge. This left the general education teachers frustrated trying to address the needs of all students in the classroom and often not being able to cover all the content.

Pacing. Most of the general education and special education teachers explained that they had to repeat information and slow down the delivery of their lessons in order to reach students in their inclusion classrooms. Freeman (2014) also found that teachers felt instruction was slowed down significantly in inclusion classes. Alicia, a special education teacher, commented on the pacing of inclusion classrooms by saying:

I don't think you can always move as quickly through material. I will say that there are times...our special education students [in inclusion classrooms] are a little bit slower. I think sometimes that those classes have to move a little slower. So, because we can't move faster, they may miss something. Science is one of those things where because of hands-on things sometimes we don't get through as many activities.

As a result, the class could be missing valuable information. Further, there may have been other negative ramifications as a result of slowing down the class for the general education students. Gwen mentioned, "sometimes [general education students] are bored. And, when they're bored then they start goofing off and they're not paying attention." Their behaviors might end up causing problems in the class.

Rather than take issue with the students, Alicia took responsibility for the results of the less stimulating classroom environment. She shared, “I don’t want to hold anybody back because we can’t move as quickly as [general education students] need to [to] make the progress [they] need to make.” However, there was little that she could do, even though she recognized that moving slowly may have negative ramifications for general education students.

Brent, a special education teacher and coach, also believed he had to slow things down if he wanted the special education students to succeed. He noted, “I don’t know if this is the best word or not, but sometimes you have to kind of water [the curriculum] down a little bit. Water down, or you need to dial it down to a level where you can reach most of the kids in there. If I stay up here (hands up high) up high, then I may not be able to reach those kids [special education students]. And, it’s going to go right over their heads. So, maybe I’m kind of gearing it down.”

Brent admitted this method may be unfair to general education students who understand concepts more quickly than their special education peers, but it saves him from having to go over the same material multiple times. As he explained: “If I go too fast...I’m just going to leave those [special education] kids in the dust. And, I’m going to have to spend a lot of time re-teaching.”

Behavior. Behavior was another challenge teachers grappled with in inclusion classes. A special education designation in academic settings is often thought of as an identification of learning disabilities in a student, however the spectrum of special education designations can range from emotional disturbance to oppositional defiance

disorders. There are also often students without special education designations but have behavior issues, such as hyperactivity, that are managed with 504 plans. Vygotsky (Powell & Kalina, 2009) was concerned about the physical disconnect for special education students as well as the social disconnect. He hoped to facilitate learning and remove these two forms of disconnection by teaching general education and special education in the same classrooms. However, he may not have imagined the social disconnect could continue even when the physical disconnect is eliminated. This social disconnect was evident especially in the science classes I observed. Some of the students were in resource classes with a small group of students for most of their day and then were in inclusion for science and social studies. There was such a huge disparity in the behavior of students in science classes. One student sat and mumbled things to himself about how he did not understand anything and that he was dumb and needed help. The other students at his table would not even look at him. This is an example of the basic behavioral challenge in the inclusion classroom at Green Valley.

The teachers mentioned that in addition to teaching they had to be prepared to deal with behavior issues. Debbie, who teaches science, mentioned the challenge of dealing with behavior issues along with trying to teach students who struggle with learning. She said,

Many [special education students] also have behavioral issues. So, not only is it that they can't or aren't capable of learning what I'm trying to teach or struggle to learn what I'm trying to teach, but then on top of that, there's behavior issues all the time.

Christine, an English teacher, also had some concerns about behavior in inclusion classrooms and how it may affect the experience for general education students. She said,

Sometimes those gen ed students are subject to situations in a classroom that take away from their learning. Definitely. It just depends on the inclusion student and what their deficit is. Because, you [may] have inclusion student[s] who are ED [emotionally disturbed] and other things sometimes [in class]. And, if there's a situation where they [gen ed students] have to be around that, and it can definitely take away from a gen ed student's experience.

During an observation in a science class, I sat by two students, one very quiet girl who was trying to work and one very active boy who was quite distracting.. The girl asked the boy several times to stop annoying her. He did not stop. The teacher never came over to us to talk to the boy about his behavior. The boy finished his worksheet very quickly. The girl worked on hers for the entire class period. I do not think she ever finished. This example suggests at the least that the wide range of student abilities can lead to behaviors that detract from the classroom environment.

Another issue could have been the class size. With such large classes, it is hard for the teachers to address content issues and behavioral ones. Christine, an English teacher, stated, "The number [of students in classes] is too high. Just the behavioral issues that arise when you have 30 students in a classroom...It becomes near impossible to really be able to devote your attention [to teaching]." Thus, at Green Valley a number of issues exacerbated classroom issues making teaching a complicated endeavor

Planning

The inclusion classroom consists of one content teacher and one special education teacher or aide. Ideally these teachers would spend time planning lessons together and working in tandem to take care of the needs of all students in their inclusion classroom (Dieker, Finnegan, Grillo, & Garland, 2013; Murawski, 2011; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). None of the teachers I interviewed spent any time creating lesson plans together. Brent, a special education teacher and coach, explained how this works with Gwen, a math teacher. He said,

Because of the coaching I do before and after school, that doesn't really allow for [planning together]. I don't ever have any illusions that I am the lead teacher. I am just going to follow [Gwen's] lead. ...That's probably not what the [central administration] want to hear, but...I think that's the reality.

Although they do not plan together, Brent and Gwen met for a few minutes to discuss what was happening in class that day or that week. This lack of planning together was evident during my observations of their math class. Their collaboration occurred in the classroom instead of in advance. Brent had a quick conversation with Gwen when he came in and went over the agenda on the board. Gwen filled Brent in on what was going to happen during the lesson that day so they could work together to help students.

Alicia, a special education teacher, worked the same way with her co-teachers. She stated, "We just find times when we can get together and talk about what's going on." However, far more often, the general education teachers emailed their lesson plans to their aide or special education teacher. Alicia confirmed, "Email is great because

[general education teachers] can send me lesson plans and I can figure out what's going on. That's probably the most common way that I communicate."

None of the teachers I interviewed had common planning time during the day. That makes collaboration very difficult and required the teachers either meet before school or after school on their own time. These teachers already spent many of their planning periods in meetings regarding their special education students and had to find time to prepare materials and lessons for classes on their own time. It was challenging trying to manage all these demands. Emily said this about planning together with her co-teacher, "I guess to be effective in planning with [co-teachers] you'd have to have time and there is no time. I mean that's just honestly the reality of it."

It was clear these teachers really struggled with finding time to plan together. Teachers suggested the lack of common planning time and other responsibilities (e.g., coaching) prevented them from being able to participate in the planning they would have preferred. Prior research (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010) suggested one of the keys for successful inclusion classes is the ability to plan together. While there is value in sharing lesson plans and some quick conversations about what is going on that day, these methods fall short of actually planning together when special education teachers could make suggestions about how to best reach special education students.

Effectiveness

The teachers had strong opinions about the effectiveness of inclusion. Alicia, the special education teacher with the most experience at Green Valley Middle School concluded:

[inclusion at Green Valley] isn't fair and the system doesn't work. There is not enough manpower to have resource classes for all subjects in many instances. General ed kids are being thrown under the bus. In a perfect world, it would be nice to separate those lower level students from the general education students [in resource classes] so that the general ed kids could get the help they need.

Alicia was not suggesting all special education students be separated from general education students. She felt special education and general education students would be better served if there were resource classes for all subjects instead of just math and English language arts. Alicia explained that she was having trouble making sure every special education student was getting the minutes of special education support required in their IEP this year. She explained that Green Valley was not out of compliance with the law, but she felt they were not meeting the needs of the students. This thinking contradicts Berdine's recommendations (2003) noted earlier. He found that teachers focus on special education students as general education students first for the benefit of all students academically and focus less on government compliance. Green Valley Middle School seems to be focusing on compliance with the laws first and meeting the needs of students next.

To be an effective teacher, educators must get to know their students and understand their needs (Eccles et al., 1993). It takes some time to get to know the students in a classroom. Prior research (Eccles et al.) suggested that one of the struggles students have in middle school is the lack of closer relationships with teachers due to the lack of time spent with them. This is particularly challenging in inclusion classrooms. In these settings, general education teachers have to study the specific

needs of their special education students and make sure they are complying with their IEPs in addition to getting to know their general education students. Although it can be difficult, Brent, a special education teacher, felt he was able to accomplish this critical task. He said,

I know who the students are that I need to help...I know what accommodations they need. I know what supports they need, and so I feel like I'm providing that and I can still do that and still be of service to the [general education] kids in the room.

As a result, Brent felt inclusion was effective at treating all students fairly. While his focus was on the special education student, he felt he was helping all the students in the classroom.

Conversely, Emily, a science teacher, felt as if no one, neither the general education nor the special education students were getting what they needed to be successful in class. She felt inclusion as implemented at Green Valley was unfair and ineffective due to limited resources available in inclusion classes. She stated,

I guess what I think is that neither side is being treated fairly actually. Neither side is being afforded the resources and the teachers they need, and the help they need. You actually got resource ELA kids that are [in inclusion classes] for science and in resource for language arts and they literally cannot read and cannot read on grade-level. I don't see how [putting them in a science inclusion class] is fair to them.

Debbie, the other science teacher, came to similar conclusions. However, she is confident inclusion could work for students if it was approached in a more manageable

way with smaller class sizes and fewer special education students. Her frustration comes from years of overcrowded classes and not enough support to help all the students in her inclusion classes.

Lee (2010b) concluded that while there are good intentions behind the ideas associated with inclusion, it is not working. He noted teacher training and a lack of communication as two of the challenges of making inclusion successful. While Green Valley is complying with IDEA regulations, large class sizes, and the lack of special education support at times contributed to the feeling inclusion was not effective.

Student Modeling

One of the basic premises of the inclusion model is that students will learn from each other. Vygotsky's vision of special education students and general education students learning together was ground breaking for its time and prescriptive for contemporary inclusion (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Teachers at Green Valley often have general education students help special education students. Christine asked her students to help each other with projects in class, but admitted some of the general education students were reluctant to help special education students during class. One student in particular became tired over time because he was working so hard to help a special education student with an assignment. Christine said, "At first, the [general education student] was very caring and very helpful, but after about two months he was exhausted from it. Some [students] are very open to it [helping special education students] and some aren't."

Emily, a science teacher, doubted her students were in a position to be teaching other students. She shared,

And isn't [peers learning from each other] part of that whole model that regular ed would pick up some of that slack and teach the lower kids? So, you'd integrate some of the lower ed with regular ed at these different tables in hopes that [regular education students] would kind of be the leaders? That doesn't work. They're not ready to teach anything.

In other words, Emily believed that all of her students should be learning and that the general education students were not prepared to take on the task of teaching their special education peers.

Debbie, a science teacher, said her students were just not willing to help. She stated, "I can tell you the kids in 7th grade, at 12 and 13, they're not going to [help the special education students]. They're just not going to do it. They don't want to." It was unclear exactly why they may not want to help the students, but Christine had some experience with general education students behaving rudely to special education students. She said, "And, so if you have the gen ed kid who is not so nice, they might not be nice to the inclusion student." Research by Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) confirmed this view. They found general education students were less positive toward their special education peers.

Prior researchers (Cosier et al., 2013) indicated one of the benefits of inclusion classrooms is the notion that students can learn from each other. Vygotsky's social learning theory introduced the idea of children with special needs being educated alongside their more able peers (Powell & Kalina, 2009). This was not always possible at Green Valley. Some of the participants interviewed felt strongly the general education students were not more knowledgeable, so they were unable to help teach their

classroom peers. Baumie (2006) also suggested that without a more knowledgeable other to guide and direct students, learning cannot take place.

Summary

The teachers talked about a number of challenges they face in inclusion classrooms. In addition to class size, the pacing of lessons, and lack of staff training, behavior can also be a challenge as special education designations include students who are oppositional, defiant, and emotionally disturbed. However, the teachers who participated in this study also discussed a number of benefits associated with this model, including learning to feel empathy. In the next chapter, I revisit my research questions and discuss the implications of this study in terms of research and practice.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of inclusion for the general education student, through the perceptions of teachers. The vast majority of prior research focused on special education students in inclusion classes with some research devoted to general education students in elementary school. Because a majority of all students are in inclusion classes at some point in their K-12 education (95% according to Department of Education, 2013), and classroom dynamics (e.g. class size, number of special education students in inclusion classes) change drastically from elementary school to middle school (Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995), it seemed critical to better understand the experience of inclusion classes in middle school to draw a more complete picture of students' educational journeys. Therefore, the research questions in this study focused on teachers' perceptions of the experience of general education students in inclusion classrooms in middle school. This chapter addresses the research questions of this study, discusses inclusion at Green Valley, suggests implications for future research, practice, and theory, and summarizes the findings.

Research Questions

The research questions I posed lent themselves to qualitative methods of data collection in order to gain insights into the experiences of the general education student in inclusion classes in middle school through interviews with teachers and classroom observations. These methods allowed a depth of understanding (Creswell, 2013) not available through quantitative methods.

Research question 1: How do teachers of inclusion classrooms perceive the traditional inclusion model's efficacy in meeting the academic needs of general education students?

While educators seem to understand the theory behind and the intentions of inclusion classes, many of the teachers who participated in this study felt the general education students in inclusion classes at Green Valley Middle School were getting a slower paced class and did not get the support they needed at times. Almost all teachers mentioned the needs and behaviors of special education students in inclusion and that they were the *key* in inclusion. Most felt that the needs of general education students were compromised in the inclusion classroom, because of the size of the classes and the split focus of the teacher. In fact, in almost every interview, teachers referred to special education students in inclusion as *inclusion students*. Clarification had to be made about just which students the teachers were referring to when they used the term inclusion students. Even though the inclusion classes were populated with many more general education students than special education students, these teachers had to focus on the needs of the special education student, because they required more assistance and a slower pace in lesson delivery. These challenges also could lead to behavior issues by any of the students as I observed during classroom visits.

When teachers were prompted to focus on the benefits of inclusion classes for general education students, the special education teachers focused on emotional benefits for general education students such as gaining empathy for others and being able to appreciate the difficulty other students have with school. They also mentioned

an opportunity to help others and model behavior. None of the special education teachers mentioned any academic benefits for the general education student in inclusion.

There was a range of opinions from the general education teachers regarding the effectiveness of inclusion classes meeting the academic needs of students. Some teachers mentioned that having two teachers in the inclusion classroom helped support the general education student who might be struggling, however these teachers also mentioned a slower paced class (Freeman, 2014), which might lead to general education students being bored. Two teachers felt there was no academic benefit whatsoever for the general education students. They were frustrated with the lack of support from special education staff and the large number of students in inclusion classes that made it difficult to help anyone. These teachers felt the inclusion model was not effective for the general education student nor was it effective for the special education student.

While special education teachers fell short in directly saying the inclusion model did not benefit the general education student, there was little mention of any academic benefits to general education students beyond being able to do peer edits for special education students. General education teachers felt there may be some academic benefits at times. All teachers expressed the idea that inclusion was focused on special education students and their needs and not the general education student.

Research question 2: How useful is Social Learning Theory in understanding how traditional inclusion works for general education students?

Social Learning Theory suggests that students learn from watching more knowledgeable others who model behavior they should exhibit academically and socially. In the inclusion classroom, other than the teacher, there are few models of behavior for special education students to emulate. At times, the general education student became bored by the slow pace of instruction and ended up spending little time on their schoolwork. Behavioral issues were also an issue with both populations. Therefore managing behavior was a daily struggle in inclusion classes. As a result, there were very few good role models in inclusion classes.

Research question 3: What else was revealed about the traditional inclusion classroom model and general education students?

One of the most significant things found during this study was the lack of planning time inclusion teachers had. There is compelling evidence (e.g., Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) that co-teachers planning together is the key to success in inclusion classes. None of the participants in this study spent any significant time planning together, because their schedules did not support this type of collaboration. Planning together would allow the content teacher to share subject information and let the special education teacher discuss strategies for working with the special education students. While teacher aides are not required to have any specific content knowledge or any training regarding teaching, planning together prior to

teaching may give teachers an opportunity to share specific information about the day's lesson to enable aides to better help students.

This research also revealed a concern with the time special education teachers and aides spent in the classroom. The special education teacher often was not in the classroom when classes began, or left early, or both. The special education aides also split their time between two classes during the same class period. However, being in a class did not mean that special education teachers supported the students' needs. Too often, special education teachers worked on paperwork during inclusion class time. There was also a concern about the special education staff's lack of content knowledge. There were times when they gave students incorrect information because they did not know the material being taught. Prior planning may have helped address this challenge.

Finally, there was a concern about the knowledge special education staff had about the content they were trying to teach to students. While teacher aides are not required to have any specific content knowledge or any training regarding teaching, planning together prior to teaching may give teachers an opportunity to share specific information about the day's lesson to enable aides to better help students.

Inclusion at Green Valley Middle School

Green Valley Middle School was careful to comply with the laws and regulations for inclusion classes. They made sure each special education student received the minutes of special education support required for complying with their IEPs. However, large class sizes and the lack of training for teachers and aides have compromised learning in inclusion classes. Also, while Green Valley teachers are complying with the

laws of inclusion, the amount of time special education staff spend in the classroom leaves inclusion classes with inadequate special education staff support.

Recommendations

Though inclusion at Green Valley Middle School is unique to this setting, the findings suggest some implications for future research and practice. In this section, I offer some suggestions for the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was a qualitative study and one of the limitations of a qualitative study is that it is not generalizable to other schools, other inclusion classes, or other teachers. Therefore, future research should extend to other schools that employ this teaching model to see if the experience is Green Valley is similar or different to that at other schools. It should also explore other different teaching models to see which model leads to greater academic gains for all students.

This study was also unique in exploring inclusion in middle schools. There has been a lack of research focused on these crucial years in a student's educational journey. Future research should continue to look at inclusion during these years. More research will be able to tease out differences in behavioral issues associated with this challenging time and inclusion. It was beyond the scope of this study to be able to determine which behavioral issues are unique to inclusion or a result of class size or the student's age. Observations of both inclusion and general education classrooms would provide greater understanding regarding these concerns.

Further, previous research focused on special education students in inclusion classrooms, but this study was unique in its focus on the general education student.

Future qualitative and quantitative research should continue to explore the experience of these students to better understand what contributes to their success or failure in inclusion classrooms.

In addition, the current study focused on the perceptions of teachers and did not include paraprofessionals, administrators, and other district and campus personnel who may have had other views and insights. Future research might include or focus on teacher aides and their impact or insights regarding inclusion. It might also include the perspective of students, parents, or other stakeholders to get a broader understanding of inclusion.

Finally, there is still a need for quantitative research to explore issues associated with student success. Therefore, a quantitative study could look closely at the grades, graduation rates, and percentage of students in inclusion, in comparison to students in different types of inclusion models. This type of study will provide valuable insights into variables that support the success of all students.

Implications for Practice

The notion behind inclusion (Croll & Moses, 2010; Individuals, 1990) was to provide a classroom with thriving general education students and include a few special education students who could see how general education classes and students work and behave. These special education students would be provided with special education support in the forms of trained personnel, accommodations that would level the playing field for them, and two teachers who would work and plan collaboratively to ensure all populations would thrive academically. These challenges are inherent to

Green Valley Middle School, but may also exist in other institutions. Therefore, these recommendations may be helpful at other institutions facing similar issues.

A large special education population, tight budgets, overcrowding, lack of planning, and time constraints often caused adjustments to be made to the inclusion model at Green Valley Middle School. One science class had almost as many special education students as it did general education students with a total class population of nearly 30 students. This class had a special education paraprofessional with no science or teacher training who split her time between two classes during one class period. Therefore, inclusion classes should have no more and preferably fewer students than other classes offered at an institution, because of the challenging natures of these classroom settings.

Second, all inclusion teachers at Green Valley should be included in consultation with administration, and not just the head of the special education department, in placing students within these classrooms. They will be able to offer more information about the needs of individual students, which can prove valuable in placement decisions. Counselors and staff who create schedules need to ensure that inclusion classes are populated in a way that will provide adequate opportunities for general education students and special education students to thrive academically. Generally, this will mean small classes with a low special education to general education student ratio. This effort may help to mitigate against some of the classroom issues at this school.

There should also be special attention paid to training teachers how to be co-teachers. Schools need to ensure that teachers and staff who work in inclusion classes

are properly trained in teaching, co-teaching, and content areas. Schools and districts need to provide ongoing training and support for teachers and staff who work in inclusion classrooms.

According to the Texas Co-Teaching: [A How-To Guide: Guidelines for Co-Teaching in Texas](#) (n.d.), co-teaching is two teachers who plan together and work to implement that plan with each teacher having specific responsibilities and who share equally in student accountability. It is not having one person teach while another person sits or walks around the room with no assignment or purpose. Green Valley has not implemented co-teaching for inclusion. The teachers and aides do not plan together. This type of teaching relegates the special education teacher to that of a helper in the class and by nature reduces the level of responsibility they may feel for students (Zigmond & Matta, 2004) and is a waste of valuable and costly resources. Therefore, content teachers, special education teachers, and/or aides should have common planning time, so they would be better able to fully share responsibilities. True co-teaching gives both teachers equal responsibility for students in the classroom and removes some of the workload from the general education teacher so she can be of more help to all students.

In addition to planning time, true co-teaching models require collaboration in the classroom. Co-teaching gives both teachers equal responsibility for students in the classroom and removes some of the workload from the general education teacher so she/he can be of more help to all students. Therefore, if teacher aides are used as instructional support for inclusion classes, they need to be trained in the content area so

they can be more effective in the classroom. Then, all key personnel would be prepared and able to better support all the students in inclusion.

Summary of Findings

Many researchers have studied inclusion with a focus on special education students, teacher attitudes, and teacher preparation that have shed light on the efficacy of the inclusion model. The current study fills a gap in the research literature by focusing on teacher perceptions of the experience of the general education student in middle school. The use of qualitative methods allowed a more in-depth exploration of the teachers' beliefs.

This study highlights middle school inclusion classrooms at one middle school and the benefits and challenges as perceived by teachers and special education staff at that school. Often these classrooms seemed to foster empathy and provided opportunities for students to help each other; however, the teaching moved at a slower pace. Further, there was inconsistent help for general education teachers from special education staff, and no planning time to prepare to teach the inclusion classes. General education teachers in this study, particularly the science teachers, felt frustrated and overwhelmed with the large class sizes and with little support from special education staff. These challenges often led to behavior issues in their inclusion classes. At Green Valley, resource classes were not available for science classes, which are academically demanding, leading these teachers to be particularly vocal about their dissatisfaction with inclusion and concerned that the model as offered at Green Valley does not seem to be helping general education students and may not be working well for special education students either.

The law requires special education students be taught in the least restrictive environment and have an IEP that outlined the number of minutes of support that must be given by special education staff in a general education class. While Green Valley Middle School complied with the law in these requirements, its implementation did not do enough to support the needs of students in inclusion. This study showed that this lack of support fails both special education students and general education students as general education teachers were often left to manage the needs of large inclusion classes without help.

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Appendix A

Teacher Protocol

I am doing research about education and how educators meet the needs of all students in inclusion classes.

1. Tell me about yourself and your experience teaching
 - a. Rewards?
 - b. Challenges?
 - c. Grade level(s)?
 - d. Student ability level (general ed, gifted, inclusion, LEAP)
 - e. Training?
2. Tell me about what you consider when developing your lesson plans for inclusion.
 - a. Talk about the process of your lesson planning for these classes
3. Do you work with a co-teacher or aide?
 - a. Can you tell me about that experience – working with another teacher, aide, or not having one?
4. How do you communicate and plan with your co-teacher?
 - a. Tell me about co-teaching planning that went well/ and didn't go well.
 - i. Process
 - ii. Tools
 - iii. Timing
 - iv. Training
 - v. Implementation

5. Tell me about your experience teaching inclusion classes
 - a. How do they compare with other classes?
 - i. pacing
 - ii. Time spent with individual instruction
 - iii. modifications to curriculum needed
 - iv. Depth of curriculum covered
 - v. Re-teaching
 - vi. Assessing for understanding
 - vii. Behavior management
 - viii. resources used
6. How do you attempt to meet the needs of all learners in your classes?
 - a. Special needs?
 - b. General education students
 - c. What are some things you do to accommodate for different learners?
 - i. What kinds of worksheets do you use if any?
 - ii. Are there any groupings you use (small group, whole group, pairs, etc)
 1. How are those groups determined?
 - iii. Do you use technology in your classroom? If so, what role does technology play in your classroom?
 - d. Modifications
 - i. Tests/quizzes
 - ii. assignments

1. how are these handled/created, by whom?
7. What are your impressions about the inclusion model?
8. What are your impressions about the inclusion model for teaching general education students?
 - a. What ways is it successful?
 - b. What ways is it unsuccessful?
9. Is there anything else you would like me to know about teaching general education students in inclusion classes?

Appendix B

Classroom Observation Protocol

Descriptions (environment, students, teacher, class, time taught, etc.):

Detailed observation notes of what the teacher did/said:

Detailed observation notes of what students did/said:

Time spent with students:

Student	time	Description	Description						
Whole class									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
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Each hash mark (|) represents 5 minutes

Other notes:

Seating Chart(s)

Appendix C

Terms

Inclusion – for the purposes of this paper, inclusion, inclusion model, inclusion classes, inclusion students, and mainstreaming refers to the environment that students are educated in. This environment is a group of students with special education designations who are not considered to have severe or profound disabilities. See “special education” term definition for more details on these students. The environment also includes students without any special education designation and students with 504 designations (see “504” for more details). The learning environment also includes a regular education teacher who is in the classroom teaching all students full time and a special education teacher who may function on a range of teaching levels.

Individualized Education Program or IEP –The legal document that is developed at an IEP meeting by an IEP team. The document describes in detail the child’s special education program. It sets the standard by which special education services are determined appropriate for a child with a disability (Dictionary, 2008).

IEP Team - develops the IEP. The law requires the team to include parent(s), regular teacher, special education teacher, special services providers, school district representative, person knowledgeable about evaluating the child’s disability, others invited by the parent or school district, and may include the student (Dictionary, 2008).

Resource class – are classes for special education students who perform three or more grade levels below the grade for their age.

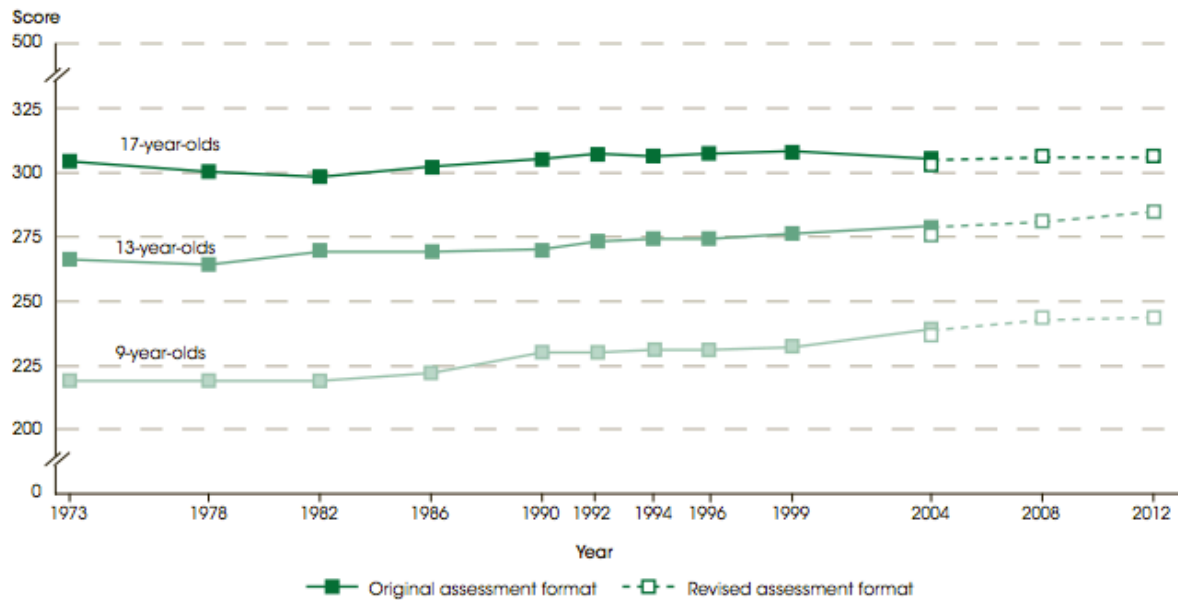
Response to Intervention (Rti) - Response to scientific, research-based intervention.

This is a multi-step process of providing measurable educational supports and instruction to children who are identified as struggling learners. An individual child's progress is monitored and results are used to make decisions about further instruction and intervention. A 504 plan may be put in place to give students support and help them perform at the same level as their peers (see 504 term for more details). Rti is most commonly used in addressing problems with reading and mathematics, but it can also be used in other areas. The Rti process is flexible and designed by school districts to meet the needs of their students. Rti may be used as part of an evaluation to identify a child as having a specific learning disability and may lead to more testing which could require a special education designation (Dictionary, 2008).

504 Plan – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act specifies no one with a disability can be excluded from participating in federally funded programs or activities. The plan outlines the accommodations and modifications educators must implement for a specific student to help them perform at the same level of their peers. Accommodations and modifications may include blood sugar monitoring, special seating, notes from class provided by teacher, larger printed materials, or assistive technology (McInerney and Elledge, 2013).

Appendix D

Average mathematics scale scores on the long-term trend National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by age: Selected years, 1973 through 2012

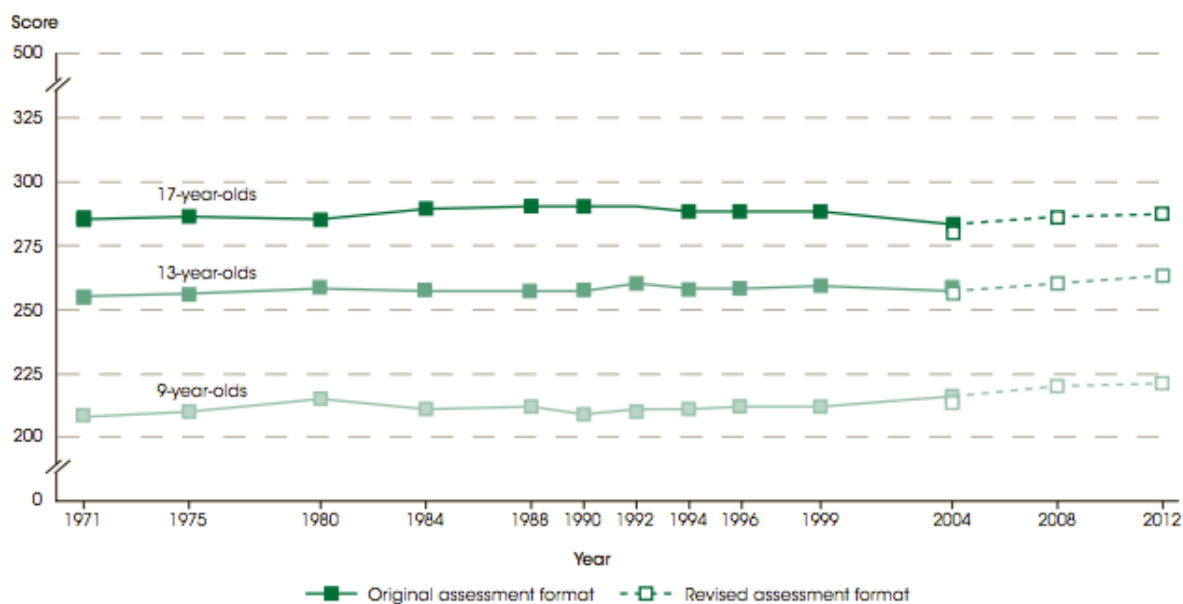


Note: includes public and private schools. NAEP scores range from 0 to 500. Several administrative changes were initiated beginning with the 2004 assessment, including allowing accommodations for students with disabilities and for English language learners. To assess the impact of these revisions, two assessments were conducted in 2004, one based on the original assessment and one based on the revised assessment. In 2008 and 2012 only the revised assessment was used.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2015).

Appendix E

Average reading scale scores on the long-term trend National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by age: Selected years, 1973 through 2012

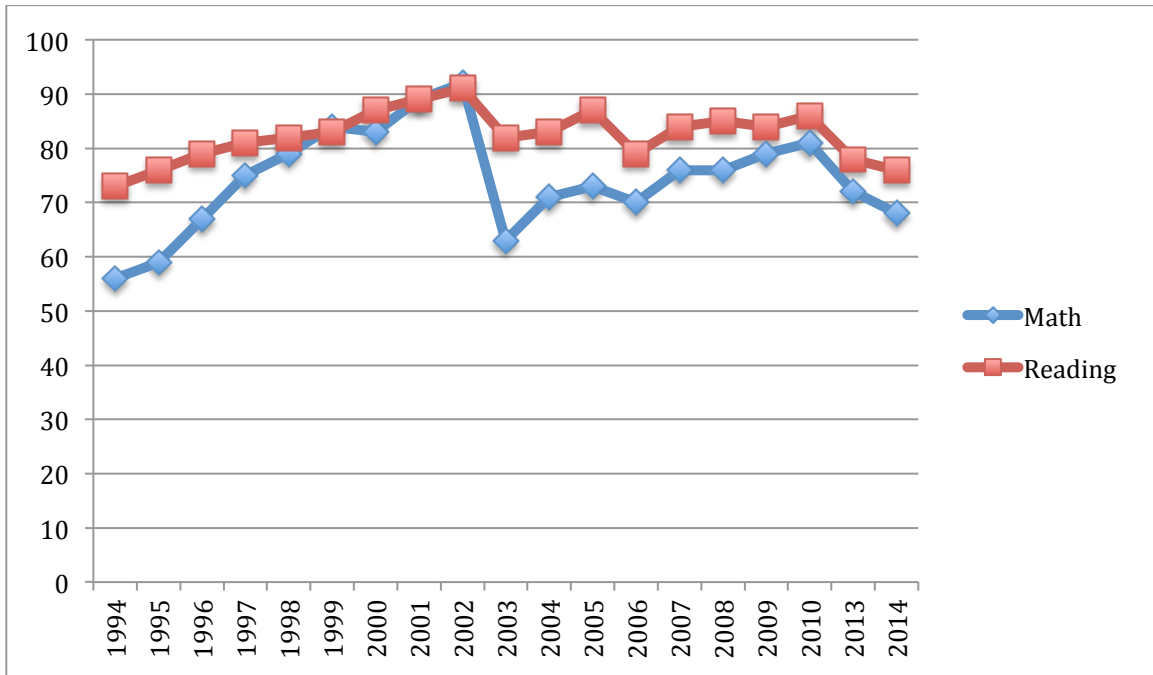


Note: includes public and private schools. NAEP scores range from 0 to 500. Several administrative changes were initiated beginning with the 2004 assessment, including allowing accommodations for students with disabilities and for English language learners. To assess the impact of these revisions, two assessments were conducted in 2004, one based on the original assessment and one based on the revised assessment. In 2008 and 2012 only the revised assessment was used.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2015).

Appendix F

Texas State 7th Grade % Met Minimum Standard



Note: Three tests are represented in chart 1) 1994-2002 TAAS, 2) 2003-20010 TAKS, 3) 2011-2014 STAAR. All are Texas State of Education standardized tests. No test information is available for 2011-2012. No average test scores are available for 2003-2014 so % of students who met minimum standards was used.

Source: Texas Education Agency (2015).

Appendix G

UT Arlington Informed Consent Document

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Valayne May
PhD student at The University of Texas at Arlington
972-357-5599
valayne.may@gmail.com

FACULTY ADVISOR

Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky – Associate Professor at The University of Texas at Arlington
tobolow@uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT

Teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of inclusion classes for general education students

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study regarding teacher perceptions of the academic experiences of general education students in inclusion classes. Your participation is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to understand the academic experiences of general education students in inclusion classes.

DURATION

The initial interview will last about one hour. There will be 1 classroom observation lasting one class period for each participant who teaches math, science, or English. Math and science observations will last one class period. Therefore, the math and science class observations will be 45 minutes, which is the length of one class period. English Language Arts teacher observations will be 90 minutes, which is the length of one class period. There will be up to four informal follow-up interviews lasting 5- 10 minutes each in the two months following my observations.

NUMBER OF SUBJECTS

The number of anticipated participants is no more than 16 teachers.

PROCEDURES

The procedures which will involve you as a research subject include:

1. One semi-structured interview, which will take no more than an hour at a time and place of participant's choosing.
2. One classroom observation for one class period of inclusion at Arbor Creek Middle School at participant's convenience. This will be scheduled with each participant.
3. Up to four informal follow-up interviews, which will take 5- 10 minutes each and will

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UT Arlington Informed Consent Document

take place up to two months following classroom observations in teacher classrooms or teachers' lounge.

The structured interview will be audio-recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means it will be typed exactly as recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The recording will be destroyed after transcription. Participants will be given the transcription to ensure their meaning was captured.

I will take notes during classroom observations regarding your teaching and actions during class. I will note as best I can the instruction/lessons you give, how much time you spend doing things and when you do things such as giving directions, asking questions, answering questions, giving individual help, conferencing, observing students, etc.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Possible benefits from this study may be the identification of effective teaching practices for all students in inclusion classes.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected including transcriptions and audio recordings from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locking office of Dr. Tobolowsky at UTA for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely

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Informed Consent Document**

event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to Valayne May at valayne.may@gmail.com or 972-357-5599 or Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky tobolow@uta.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent Date

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER DATE

IRB Approval Date: SEP 02 2015

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Appendix H



UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
REGULATORY SERVICES

Institutional Review Board Notification of Exemption

September 2, 2015

Valayne May
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Protocol Number: 2015-0890

Protocol Title: *Teachers' perceptions regarding efficacy of inclusion classes for general education students*

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) and (2).

- (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **September 2, 2015**.

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB any proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject." Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subject Protection (HSP) Training on file with this office. Completion certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact Alyson Stearns at 817-272-9329 or astearns@uta.edu. You may also contact Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

REGULATORY SERVICES
SERVICES

The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation
202 E. Border Street, Ste. 201, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box#19188
(T) 817-272-3723 (F) 817-272-6808 (E) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (W) www.uta.edu/irs

Appendix I



REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Please submit the completed request form along with IRB Application/ Approval letter* or and data collection instrument (if applicable) to: fitzhughsr@lisd.net

Name of person making the request: Valayne May

Lewisville ISD employee: yes: no:

Contact information: 972-357-5599 or mayv@lisd.net

Name of University or organization sponsoring your research: The University of Texas at Arlington

In order to consider your request, the following information is required:

What is the purpose of your research proposal?

The purpose of my research proposal is to understand the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding students in inclusion classes.

What data do you propose to collect in LISD?

I will be conducting interviews with 8 middle school teachers – 6 general education content teachers and 2 special education teachers. I will be conducting 12 classroom observations, 2 for each general education teacher.

How do you plan to collect this data?

I will record interviews off-campus at a place of the participants' choosing.

I will be taking notes during classroom observations regarding teachers' actions.

I will conduct informal "one-legged" interviews as a follow-up to classroom observations.

How do you plan to ensure confidentiality of the identity of participants?

I will assign pseudonyms for all participants. I will also be coding data and referring to participants' work place, classrooms, and any other identifying verbiage with pseudonyms or numbers.

Have you received IRB approval from your university?

I am in the process of receiving IRB approval. They are awaiting approval from the LISD.

Please provide the name, contact information, and signature of your university supervisor, below.

Name of University Supervisor: Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky

Contact information: tobolow@uta.edu (817) 272-7269

My signature below indicates that I am aware of and approve of this proposal and that I am available for questions should the need arise.

B. Tobolowsky
University Supervisor/ Supervisor of Organization

8-13-15
Date

If approved, LISD request a copy of any report that utilizes the data from this agreement. I will gladly provide a copy of my research at its conclusion. I am hoping the data will be helpful to our district and to education at large.

*IRB approval form/letter must be submitted to LISD prior to the start of your data collection process.

FOR LISD USE ONLY	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I approve of the proposal without further revision(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> I conditionally approve of the proposal, with revisions (see attached)
<u>B. Brown</u> Associate Superintendent, LISD	_____ Date

Biography

Valayne May began her interest in education and special education when her five children were in school and struggled academically. She took her first college course when her youngest child was in middle school. She received her Associate's of General Studies from Utah Valley University. May transferred to The University of Maryland at College Park to continue her education. She received her Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Master's of Education there. She was admitted to an exclusive teaching internship program for Montgomery County Public Schools and began teaching secondary English. May moved to Texas where she continued to teach English and enrolled in a Ph.D program at the University of Texas at Arlington receiving her degree in Educational Leadership and Policy.