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General and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities

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GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

OF FULL MEMBERSHIP FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by

Pamela S. Morgan, A.A.S., B.S., M. Ed.

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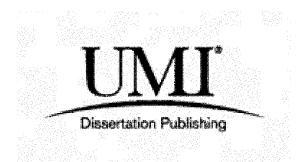COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

The idea of full membership (FM) for students with disabilities (SWD) originated with the 1975 *Education for all Handicapped Children Act* which required equal educational access for these students. Full membership has evolved from mainstreaming to focusing on acceptance and belonging in a school community where all stakeholders have a voice and the culture is reflective of these values and beliefs. Despite American public education policy, there appears to be minimal progress for SWD in gaining FM. This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to gain insight into the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers. Comparing two high schools in the southern region of the United States, through face-to-face interviews with five general and nine special education teachers, the author explored how scripts of disability inform teacher practices and what systemic barriers may be in place that impede FM for SWD. The findings in this study provided evidence that teachers agreed on the importance of FM. Parental involvement is a vital component for successful implementation. Unexpectedly, a lack of exposure to disabilities during formative years and special education teacher perceptions tended to limit FM opportunities due to focusing on scripts of disability. Challenges needing to be addressed include educator mindset toward the abilities of SWD and access to FM opportunities. Methods to overcoming FM barriers and value-laden actions include professional learning communities, collaborative practices, and continuous sustained professional development that reflects on self-beliefs

and practices. Additional research is needed in the areas of lack of exposure to others with disabilities and teacher perceptions of the role they play in FM opportunities for SWD.

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Author _Pamela S. Morgan_

Date _March 1, 2014_

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends. Without their encouragement and continuous support, I would never have completed this journey. Each of you has given your time, love, faith, and in many cases, guidance and wonderful suggestions. I love you for all that you have helped me to accomplish. To Mr. Randy Moore, who mentored me through my internship. Your in-depth questioning and discussions helped me to reach deep within my own thoughts to think critically about many aspects of education that I had overlooked. And finally, to Dr. Pauline Leonard for holding my hand and guiding me throughout this process. You have been an inspiration. Your high expectations, attention to detail, and rigorous educational coursework enabled me to stretch my own abilities. Without you to lead me through the labyrinth of dissertation writing, I would not have completed my research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Contextualization of the Problem

Education has long been considered as the conduit for lessening inequality and increasing opportunities for employment and quality of life for future generations. For this to occur, all students, including those with disabilities, must be included in all aspects of the educational realm. The idea of full membership for students with disabilities originated in the 1970s. Prior to 1975, students identified with a disability were mainly educated in separate classrooms and taught a curriculum different from their non-disabled peers. These students were isolated, stigmatized, even denied the right to attend their neighborhood schools. This changed with the advent of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s and 1970s. The Civil Rights Movement was sparked by the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The Justices' ruling, that segregated but equal schools were unconstitutional, was a major catalyst for change in education. The success of the Civil Rights Movement encouraged advocates for students with disabilities to voice their beliefs that it was also unconstitutional to segregate students because of a disability (Banks, 2006).

The voices of these advocates led to the 1975 enactment of Public Law 94-142, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. This act, today known as the

Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA), has been a progressive movement. The act began by decreeing that students with exceptional needs be placed in classes with their general education peers (IDEIA, 2004). This placement has progressed from mainstreaming to full inclusion to full membership.

Mainstreaming students with disabilities was reserved for those students needing the least amount of support in a general education classroom. Minor adjustments were made, but the main thrust was to gain academic and social benefit. Full inclusion, defined by Wright and Wright (2009) as "an effort to make sure students with disabilities go to school with their friends and neighbors, while also receiving the specially designed instruction and support they need to achieve high standards and succeed as learners" (p. 427) was the idea that students with disabilities not be segregated. Educational focus is generally on life skills and may include a full team of specialists working together to ensure success and individualization for the student. Full membership goes beyond access to educational programs for students with disabilities. The concept of full membership encompasses all areas and aspects of the school community including sports programs, honors ceremonies, and student council including everything in-between.

The *Education for All Handicapped Children's Act*, known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA), also decreed that students with disabilities receive their education in the least restrictive environment (IDEIA, 2004). The least restrictive environment has evolved to mean receiving an education in the general education classroom with non-disabled peers. Yet, "In a deeper sense, the intent of IDEIA had moral underpinnings, which was to ensure full school membership for students having the greatest needs" (Morgan & Leonard, 2012, p. 1). To

date, the idea of full membership goes beyond mainstreaming and inclusion, and has been approached more technically than through any ethical or moralistic manner, and with minimal progress. Full membership is the premise that students should be included in every aspect of the school community. Black and Burello (2010) reported that full membership for students places them at the center of education. Acknowledging the unique, individual needs of students helps overcome the stigma of special education. The premise of full membership is to overcome stigma and reduce marginalization. As Black and Burello (2010) stated, "Learning from difference is fundamental to understanding who all of us are as a community of individuals that are continuously in relationship with other human beings" (p.1). Full membership includes participation in activities within and outside of the classroom (Morgan & Leonard, 2012) while being a valued member of the school community. Full membership also includes access to social roles and group belonging (Williams & Downing, 1998). Focusing on disabilities inhibits a student's ability to develop relationships and be accepted.

Even with numerous federal and state educational policies, mandated ethics trainings, and court cases revolving around the denial of the right to a free and appropriate public education, full membership continues to elude students with disabilities. Individuals in special education frequently spout "the law" (meaning regulations outlined in IDEIA) as a method to motivate other educators into doing what is right for students with disabilities. However, at what cost is this to those students? While the law includes language that says students must be educated in the least restrictive environment with non-disabled peers to the extent appropriate while being given access to all activities, the courts have been equally involved with explaining and litigating the

exact meaning of including students with disabilities and all that it encompasses (Ware, 2002). While the courts continue to interpret the law as set forth in IDEIA, the neediest of students with the greatest potential for growth are being excluded and left behind.

Full membership goes beyond giving students with disabilities access to educational programs equal to their general education peers. It goes on to naturally encompass all areas and aspects of the school community. Access and involvement in sports, honor ceremonies, student council, and science fairs along with everything in-between should be included.

According to Black and Burello (2010), two major challenges to achieving full membership for students with disabilities are scripts of disability and systemic barriers. Scripts of disability may lead those working with students having disabilities to perceptions of inability. These perceptions, developed over time from experiences, values, and knowledge, often influence how general and special education teachers respond to students with disabilities, thereby limiting full membership opportunities. Systemic barriers are those written and unwritten policies, procedures, and practices that limit opportunities for students with disabilities to have full access to their school community.

Scripts of disability are medical or psychological labels or descriptions, given or perceived, that institutionally identifies students as having some type of deficiency or damage. These scripts have shaped professional practice, reactions, and behaviors in educational settings, in turn creating negative school cultures. These practices, reactions, and behaviors have also shaped teachers' beliefs in how students with disabilities are able to perform in an educational setting. Sileo, Sileo, and Pierce (2008) reported there are

many lenses through which teachers make decisions. Teachers may be the most important variable in education to ensure ethical consideration is given so all children are afforded equal educational experiences. Personal values impacting decisions and judgments may be biased and, therefore, limit the full membership potential for students with disabilities. In this author's experience, even the medical profession believes that a script of disability automatically means a student needs special education and is deficient. This was borne out by the number of special education evaluation requests medical doctors have sent to the special education department in the district where the current study took place.

Educational institutions should be places where students with disabilities are able to develop close trusting relationships with adults and peers. These relationships create a climate for personal growth and intellectual development. Full membership enhances this growth and development, which includes participation in all aspects of the school community. Allowing students full access to develop this sense of belonging and to being a full contributing member of the school community is important (Hagborg, 1998).

Frequently, students with disabilities are not allowed full access to the educational community to which they belong. Systemic barriers deter their right to be included in the school community. Barriers such as school policies, procedures, or practices may unfairly exclude certain groups from taking part. These barriers, which develop over time and may be evident in the school culture, are often the result of the scripts of disability that label students with disabilities as being defective, thereby considered below the expected standards of the norm or average students (Morgan & Leonard, 2012).

This dissertation study investigated the perspectives of general and special education teachers regarding full membership for students with disabilities. Research and

teacher interview questions revolved around uncovering teachers' perspectives related to two major challenges to achieving full membership in a high school setting; scripts of disability and systemic barriers. The researcher hoped to gain an understanding of why full membership had been denied to many students with disabilities. Utilizing phenomenological qualitative methodology and data collection methods, the intent was to explore how scripts of disability and systemic barriers affect full membership opportunities for students with disabilities.

Teachers may be the most important variable in providing full membership opportunities for students with disabilities (Sileo et al., 2008). Willingness to work with the diverse needs of these students is dependent upon their beliefs or perceptions. This includes not only their perceptions of the ability of students to learn, but with their own ability to teach as well. Teacher perceptions are consciously or unconsciously guided by frames of reference. Frames of reference are the perceptual filters used to make decisions and determine understanding of life experiences. Perceptual filters in turn may not allow for understanding of others, setting up parameters that are resistant to mindset change (Friend & Cook, 1992). A clash of personal values and perceptions develop that create dissonance and conflict between teachers and students with disabilities.

In the preparation of teachers to enter the world of education, two service models have guided teachers along different pathways (Engstrom, 2003). General education teacher training programs frequently do not include the specialized training necessary to support the educational needs of students with disabilities. Special education teachers often receive training in specialized skills to work with these students but lack knowledge or experience in working with general education teachers and curriculum in blended or

heterogeneous classrooms, yet both are equal stakeholders in the educational process (Fullan & St. Germain, 2006).

Statement of the Problem and Justification

Students with disabilities often struggle in areas that the average individual does not. Cognitive abilities, communication, mobility, and social or emotional development are issues these students deal with on a daily basis. Without continuous opportunities to observe non-disabled peers, learn from adults, and practice independence through experiences external of a special education classroom, these students will continue to be marginalized. Students with disabilities frequently develop a learned helplessness, unable to make decisions on their own or realizing they are capable of offering valid contributions that make and create change (Steele, 2012). Pertinent educational stakeholders contribute knowledge and experience that can help counteract the many and varied barriers to full membership (Black & Burello, 2010). The Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) website provides a set of 12 professional and ethical principles with standards of practice. Of importance and direct relationship to full membership for students with disabilities are: (a) promoting meaningful and inclusive participation for individuals with exceptionalities in their school and communities; (b) practicing collegiality with others who are providing services to individuals with exceptionalities; and (c) advocating for professional conditions and resources that will improve learning outcomes of individuals with exceptionalities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2010). Starratt's (2012) ethical position that teachers should teach to nurture the growth of all students in order for them to become *fully participating adults* in a global society aligns with the CEC principle of promoting meaningful, inclusive participation, and full

membership. Additionally, to achieve a fully inclusive school environment would require that general and special education teachers be mindful of what Branson (2010) described as the ethic of doing right by others, putting aside one's own gains to focus on those of others. Ware (2002) mentioned the need to change our way of thinking from students having a disability to students having diverse abilities. In other words, a disability is not a deficit.

A lack of knowledge and exposure related to special education needs may affect how teachers work with students having disabilities, resulting in a denial of full membership. This lack of knowledge may be why educators focus on scripts of disability much like trying to treat a patient with medication, the prescription being an individualized education plan.

Schools often focus on students' weaknesses rather than their abilities and strengths. Systemic barriers may be the cause. A lack of flexibility in policy and procedure or limitations in staff due to training deficits or lack of resources to address full membership for students with disabilities are examples of systemic barriers. Focusing on weaknesses may also be due to a school's overall culture, its unwritten rules, norms, and expectations that have developed over time (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010).

As previously mentioned, several of the principles of what Black and Burello (2010) described as full membership are noticeably parallel to the standards and practices cited by the CEC as well as the positions reflected in the writings of Starratt and Branson. For example, the principle of recognizing and centering differences along with high expectations for all students correlates with that of the CEC standard of promoting meaningful and inclusive participation of students with disabilities. Associated with this

standard was Black and Burello's (2010) principle for developing schools where students

with disabilities are not segregated but placed with their general education peers.

Starratt's (2012) ethical rationale for preparing students to be contributing adults in a

global society aligns with Black and Burello's principle of starting from difference,

moving to community, and then into the greater common global arena increases the

potential for students with disabilities to become those contributing adults in an

increasingly complex society. Keeping these ideas in mind, gaining insight into the

perspectives of general and special education teachers regarding full membership for

students with disabilities is important in order to make decisions that will improve and

increase opportunities for these often marginalized students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gain a clear

understanding of the perspectives and lived experiences of general and special education

teachers regarding full membership for students with disabilities. Exploring themes and

patterns derived from collected data, this researcher hoped to add to the growing bank of

knowledge related to barriers that deny students with disabilities the opportunity and right

to full membership in the schools they attend. School has historically emphasized

induction into the dominant culture. Specifically, chosen curriculum was utilized to attain

this goal without consideration for meeting all learner needs (Paliokosta & Blandford,

2012). Consider, for example, textbooks that shared only Christopher Columbus's voyage

to the new world without including the experiences of the natives he encountered when

arriving. Albert Einstein was considered a brilliant man, but it was not until recently that

historical experts mentioned that he may have had a learning disability and did not learn

to talk until around the age of five. Another example of cultural domination was in historical documentation of the United States westward expansion in the middle 1800s. The movement west for the greater good of white men was without regard for the lives or livelihood of those Native American peoples who were displaced, a circumstance which was hidden for many years.

Steele (2012) stated that school personnel may not realize the multitude of ways students with disabilities are able to participate in the greater school and external community. Teachers get "caught up" in their personal attitudes or labels created by scripts of disabilities. Thinking that non-verbal students or those with behavioral difficulties do not belong in the school community due to the challenges they present has echoed through the schools with which this researcher has worked. The personal values of teachers may be reflected in teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward these students. Scripts of disability may be characterized by automatic assumptions that students with disabilities are unable to reach the same potential as their non-disabled peers. There may by systemic barriers in place that keep these students from being granted full membership in the school community.

Full membership requires that we view students with disabilities through a set of lenses different than those currently used. It was anticipated that this dissertation research study would provide insight into general and special education teachers' perceptions of full membership. The study's findings should add to the growing body of knowledge regarding education for students with disabilities and toward cultivating full membership in the school community. Additionally, it was anticipated that the findings would serve to

inform educators of perceptions related to scripts of disability and systemic barriers needing change or further study.

Conceptual Framework

It may take a paradigm shift in the mindset of many stakeholders to truly understand the concept of authentic inclusion. Kuhn (1962) defined paradigm as a strongly established belief in an opinion or viewpoint. He goes on to mention the prevailing paradigm regarding students with disabilities as being defined by four assumptions: (a) intelligence can be reliably measured; (b) intellectual disability can be quantified; (c) students with an intellectual disability are unable to learn as much general education curriculum as their peers without a disability; and (d) when unsure if students can learn or be able to communicate understanding, we presume they cannot and probably never will. According to Kuhn, these presumptions are visible in many of our special education programs and in the decisions made about students with disabilities by administrators and teachers including the low expectations many general and special educators have for them.

Educator behaviors are generally due to a varied set of professional and personal experiences that have informed their beliefs about students with disabilities (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010). Cultural constructs of difference are represented in personal attitudes, beliefs, and values. These constructs often shape how educators view and interact with students with disabilities (Steele, 2012). The importance of this study was to gain knowledge of how scripts of disability and systemic barriers factor into providing or preventing educational benefit and full membership to students with disabilities. Embracing full membership in schools that do not marginalize but engage all

stakeholders to promote learner-centered, quality-of-life experiences is necessary to ensuring that students with disabilities are able to take their place in society as contributing, participating members (Black &Burello, 2010). As a community of learners, teachers and students must learn to value and respect themselves and others (Steele, 2012).

Digging deeper into developing full membership opportunities for students with disabilities, Robinson and Carrington (2002) developed "four guiding principles to support the development of inclusive school communities" (p. 326). These four guiding principles are: (a) develop professional learning communities; (b) engage in continuous professional development; (c) foster effective parental collaboration; and (d) engage students as participating citizens in their school community.

Black and Burello's (2010) discussion of full membership identified several features or principles which should be present in fully inclusive schools and while not parallel to those mentioned by Robinson and Carrington, directly tie to improved outcomes for students with disabilities when implemented:

- school members having the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to promote high expectation for students;

- students having access to quality teachers with moral literacy;

- students having access to quality teachers;

- parents and guardians being able to fully participate in the life of the school;

- teachers starting from differentiating instruction to addressing diversity and moving towards transference of learning to the community and greater society outside of the classroom;

- leaders invoking principles of deliberative democracy;

Black and Burello expanded Robinson and Carrington's principles to include:

- communities choosing to define disability as a central feature of the human experience while recognizing differences, but also demanding high expectations for all students;

- stakeholders developing schools where students with IEPs are placed with peers in natural proportion, not in clustered programs of like students;

- administrators being prepared to center purpose and work against bureaucratic inertia; principles of deliberative democracy invoked by school leaders (pp.2-6)

These principles of full membership guided the researcher's focus on two challenging, interrelated conceptual aspects of full membership for students with disabilities that were addressed in this study: *scripts of disability and systemic barriers from the perspectives of general and special education teachers.*

School culture includes those traditions, customs, norms, and expectations (Sergovanni, 2006) that are shared by those working in or involved with the school community. School culture is shaped by interactions and activities of those involved in the school. This culture develops from the assumptions, personal experiences, and values of individuals which are used as filters through which decisions are made and actions are carried out. The culture also provides a sense of importance, significance, and purpose.

According to Fullan and St. Germain (2006), "Schools promote a sense of moral purpose by providing opportunities for students to translate the values of the school community into personal behaviors" (p. 71). Principals, as school leaders, reflect overall

school values and are central to the implementation and maintenance of full membership for students with disabilities. The values and beliefs of the principal may influence the perceptions of teachers (Sergiovanni, 2006). Individual differences must be considered while treating everyone with equity (Black & Burello, 2010). The school community, led by the principal, should have equal opportunity for all. This leadership sets the learning climate and can influence the degree of concern that general and special education teachers have for the success of students with disabilities.

School culture often reflects systemic barriers that result in the marginalization of students with disabilities. Assumptions, values, and behaviors that reflect views of defect or damage when describing students with disability have evolved and are evident in many school cultures. Scripts of disability and systemic barriers informed by assumptions, values, and labels are those broad constructs of disability that limit our ability to see beyond what medical and psychological perspectives have created. School administrators and teachers frequently assume that students with disabilities have natural limitations and differences (Ware, 2002). Leadership and a shared vision of an inclusive school culture are the essential components to improving full membership opportunities for students with disabilities (Poon-McBrayer, 2004).

One example of assumptions, values, and labels that run counter to facilitating full membership and that stands out in the researcher's memory pertains to her days as a special education teacher. One particular student, labeled emotionally disabled, was to be placed in classes as a full-inclusion student. Because of the student's "label" and general education teachers' assumptions that he would be a behavior problem, he was inadvertently set up for failure. Preferential seating was used to keep control of his

behavior in the classroom, which resulted in his being segregated from his peers and additional behavioral outbursts as he attempted to gain teacher attention. Eventually, a specialized system of behavioral support was put into place where the student was placed in a self-contained setting and expected to learn academic and social skills in a one-on-one setting with only one adult and limited peer interactions. Another example of a "label" or "script of disability" was the result of a principal's perception of disability. During summer remediation classes, one student was identified as having a disability based on a perceived script of disability due to his acting out behavior. Because of this behavior and the way the student "looked," the principal took the student to the special education instructional specialist to "do something with him since he is one of yours". The instructional specialist immediately told the principal that the student was not in special education. The principal's response was, "He must be, he acts like he is." In other words, the principal had a preconceived script for how special education students behave (Morgan & Leonard, 2012).

Research Questions

Informed by these significant conceptual aspects of full membership, data were collected to determine challenges that deter the provision of full membership for students with disabilities and, therefore, needed to be overcome. Questions that guided the research:

1. What are general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities?

2. What scripts of disability may be reflected in the general and special education teachers' practice?

3. What systemic barriers may exist in the high school communityto prevent

students with disabilities from having full membership?

Definition of Terms

This section provides the definitions of special education terminology that were

used throughout this research project.

1. Accommodations: changes in information presentation that do not change the format.

Possible changes include method of presentation, response styles, setting, or timing.

2. Belonging: a bond or connection.

3. General Education: globally designed educational program with curriculum based on

national standards that all children are expected to learn.

4. Inclusion: "an effort to make sure students with disabilities go to school with their

friends and neighbors, while also receiving the 'specially designed instruction and

support' they need to achieve high standards and succeed as learners" (Wright & Wright,

2009, p. 427). Ware (2002) included the idea that students with disabilities are not

segregated from their non-disabled peers.

5. Mainstreaming: including students with disabilities needing minimal support in general

education classrooms with non-disabled peers.

6. Modifications: changes in what a student is expected to know, learn, and or

demonstrate. Possible changes include content, instructional level, formatting of

materials, and alternate assessments.

7. Participation: involvement in academic and non-academic activities including a feeling

of belonging and interactions between an individual and others in a particular setting or

activity (Erickson, 2005).

8. <u>Resource Room:</u> a classroom where students with disabilities spend a portion of the school day receiving specialized instruction, subject specific support, or testing accommodations (Morgan & Leonard, 2012).

9. <u>School Membership:</u> a bond or connection in an educational setting.

10. <u>Self-Contained Classroom:</u> room where students with disabilities may spend up to 80% of the day receiving specialized curricular instruction and related service support designed to meet their specific educational needs.

11. <u>Special Education:</u> specially designed instruction, related services, and or support provided to public or charter school students developed to meet each student's unique needs, at no cost to parents.

Summary of Chapter One

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of full membership for students with disabilities, as well as a basic timeline for the provision of special education for students with disabilities. It also provided an overview of scripts of disability and systemic barriers as they relate to marginalizing these students and how this study was expected to contribute to the growing research for providing full membership to all students. Furthermore, the chapter included identified the phenomenological qualitative research methodology and presented the research questions that guided the study. Finally, definitions of special education terms were provided.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction of Chapter Two

Chapter two reviews the literature related to the stated problem and research questions. The literature review begins with the historical background related to the development of the full membership concept, including highlights of challenges and ethical issues that surround the provision of full membership for students with disabilities. There is also a discussion of how scripts of disability developed and are reflected in systemic barriers, followed by ideas designed to alleviate these barriers that marginalize students with disabilities and deny them opportunities to become contributing, participating members of the greater society.

Historical Background

Historically, individuals determined to have a disability were ill-treated by a non-disabled society. Being born with or developing a disability sentenced an individual to a life of solitude, ridicule, and often death. Over time, residential homes were built for children and adults with disabilities. These children and adults were frequently pressed into service as cheap labor during the industrial revolution. At the end of the 19th century, society became aware of rampant child abuse and sub-standard labor conditions for children, bringing about new laws that reformed work and educational practices (Wood, 2002).

Full membership for students with disabilities grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Banks, 2006). Prior to 1975, many students were educated in self-contained classrooms, if allowed in a public school. Education reform for students with disabilities began with the inception of federal legislation known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* of 1975 or Public Law 94-142 which has evolved through the years and is today known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA). This act required equal access to public education for students with disabilities and has brought about far reaching changes that have impacted the entire educational system. These changes were seen in teacher preparation programs, teacher certification requirements, teaching methods, the provision of services, and curriculum.

The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* continues to undergo numerous changes, being strengthened with each reauthorization. In IDEIA 2004, Congress set forth the need for students to participate not only in the general education curriculum, but also extracurricular and non-curricular activities (IDEIA, 2004; Kleinert, Miracle, & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Full membership for students with disabilities provides these opportunities, allowing students to grow socially and emotionally, while ensuring access to curriculum that will better prepare them to take their rightful place in society upon graduation.

When segregated from their non-disabled peers, students with disabilities often remain solitary, lacking friendships, and experiencing personal loneliness which carries over into adulthood. Finn (1989) and Osterman (2000) wrote that active involvement in and outside of the classroom promoted a sense of belonging through participation.

Without membership bonds, students gradually disengage. With belonging comes acceptance, respect, and commitment to education which is reflected in a reduction of drop-out rates for students with disabilities.

With each reauthorization of the original act, the language of the law has transitioned. Equal access, often seen as a parallel method of educating students with disabilities, using self-contained special education classes, has evolved into including students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms (Engstrom, 2003). The general education classroom was considered as the least restrictive environment (Clampit, Holifield, & Nichols, 2004). Many area school officials have forgotten special education is a service not a placement (Wright & Wright, 2009). Special education services to students with disabilities are provided along a continuum based on the individual needs and abilities of each child. The move to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms meant that those originally in self-contained classes or resource settings where they spent a portion of the day receiving specialized instruction, subject specific support, or testing accommodations were thrust into general education classrooms all day long, frequently without adequate educational support (Morgan & Leonard, 2012).

Throughout the past four decades, special education has suffered problematic issues. One of the most lamented is that of including students with disabilities in the school community as an equal member. Merging the education of students with disabilities with the education of their non-disabled peers into a unitary system has spurred both advocates and opponents into action (Townsend, 2009). Inclusive practices were not put into place as a punishment for teachers or to eradicate the need for special

education, but to validate and value students' individuality. There is a modicum of dissention among special education professionals regarding inclusion which may be a reflection of ethical issues including values and culture. There have been ethically and politically charged incidents over time with both positive and negative outcomes (Paul, French & Cranston-Gingras, 2001). Despite the law set forth in IDEIA, and the numerous court cases revolving around education in the LRE, and the inclusion of students in the school community, these children continue to be excluded, ostracized, overlooked, and left behind. We must marry our different philosophies into a new way of thinking to address the day-to-day needs of all students (Leonard & Leonard, 2003).

Wright and Wright (2009) defined inclusion as "an effort to make sure students with disabilities go to school with their friends and neighbors, while also receiving the 'specially designed instruction and support' they need to achieve high standards and succeed as learners" (p. 427). This instruction and support is outlined in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document that drives a student's instructional program by addressing his or her educational needs. It includes information such as present levels of academic performance, along with stating the goals and objectives expected to be mastered. Included in this document are accommodations, strategies, and interventions that enable the student access to the general curriculum. There may also be assistive technological supports and related services, such as speech therapy, needed to help bridge the deficits so the student has increased opportunities to be academically successful. The IEP outlines the number of minutes a student is to spend in a general education setting, a special education setting, and in some cases, time working and learning in the community.

Full Membership

Full membership goes beyond inclusion and the implementation of an IEP. Full membership in a school can be perceived as acceptance in and belonging to a school community where all stakeholders have a voice and the culture is reflective of these values and beliefs. The concept means not only recognizing individual differences, but acknowledging those differences, while demanding high expectations for all students so no one becomes marginalized or excluded. Full membership exists when individual differences are acknowledged and considered in the interest of student learning, not to marginalize and exclude. Full membership means recognizing and centering differences (Black & Burello, 2010). Full membership includes access to valued social roles and symbols of belonging that reflect equity with non-disabled students (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010). Full membership also includes active engagement in the academic side of education balanced with the social side of the school community. Smerdon (2002) reported that membership can be measured by belonging and academic commitment which is tied to relationships with positive social development. Hagborg (1998) was already one step further when he reported that full membership is an important component for preventing dropouts. Significant barriers to full membership for students with disabilities remain due to separate educational activities and classrooms along with limited social interaction with non-disabled peers (Kleinart et al., 1997).

Schools should be places where students are able to develop trusting relationships with adults and peers in a climate conducive to intellectual development and personal growth through participation in activities throughout the school community (Morgan & Leonard, 2012). According to Smerdon (2002), student opportunities and experiences are

a strong factor in determining their own perceptions of membership. Providing full membership takes more than just allowing students to be involved with all aspects of the school community. Implementing full membership practices will take all members of the school community to enfold students with disabilities and consider them as "ours" while accepting and embracing their differences, and providing support. Townsend (2009) simply put it that full membership for students with disabilities requires educators to reflect on self-beliefs and practices within the school community in order to create change.

Barriers to Full Membership

Black and Burello (2010) provided some insight into why students with disabilities continue to be marginalized, even ostracized, not reaching their maximum potential. Learning from diversity is the true basis for understanding how a community works and functions together. A combination of systemic barriers, scripts of disability, and skewed ethical, value-laden principles may be embedded in society when considering the involvement of these students in all aspects of the educational experience. Townsend (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study of 150 educators. Her intent was to identify, describe, and explain how attitudes towards inclusive education are reflected in educational practices and policies. She reported that:

> Teachers frequently voiced opinions that including students with disabilities in general education settings was forced or merely aimed at following local, state, and federal mandates. No teachers alluded to the assimilation of students with disabilities being accepted members of the school community (p. 152).

According to Maslow's (1970) hierarchical pyramid of needs, belonging is a basic, psychological need and demonstrates the importance of membership. The third level, love and belonging, must be met before advancement to the fourth level, achievement and mastery, which includes education and learning. Academic hierarchy often requires students to achieve and master curricular content before they have belonging. We expect them to prove they are worthy of belonging by performing at a specific skill level before allowing them full membership (Jorgensen et al., 2010).

The civil right of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) "might be interpreted as an ethical imperative rather than simply a legal mandate that demands compliance through potential sanctions" (Black & Burello, 2010, p. 6). Moreover, general education and special education teachers need to embrace the notion of "full membership." The vast majority of variation in membership has been within schools not between schools. It is strongly shaped by student treatment in the school itself (Smerdon, 2002).

Ware (2002) wrote that the idea of a disability naturally limiting an individual's ability to lead a "normal" life is "grounded in biological, social, and cognitive sciences" (p. 146). These sciences have led to the disability scripts we know or hear used today. Students are measured against norms that set them up for failure, being labeled by presumptions of inability leading to marginalization. The learning potential of students is often dictated by the score from an intelligence evaluation designed to measure aptitude not achievement. Once students are labeled with a disability, they are often considered defective and unable to learn, a script that leads to skewed perceptions of their ability (Jorgensen et al., 2010)

Utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach to evaluating students in order to determine the need for special education has reduced the chances that a student will be misidentified as having a disability (Berger & Luckman, 1966), Yet, the scripts of inability, weakness, and limitations continue to be reflected in immoral, value-laden decisions regarding the perceptions of student ability. These perceptions influence how students with disabilities are accepted by teachers and non-disabled peers.

These scripts of disability have also influenced teachers' ideas as related to teacher-student relationships and how they respond to students with problems. Beliefs shape practice and are lenses through which we make decisions (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009). These beliefs guide behaviors, interactions, and inform practice, causing teachers to overlook or dismiss the contributions students with disabilities are able to make in the school community. Addressing student differences with others is an avenue for enhancing membership. Through differentiation, tailored to specific needs, attitudes towards education and opportunities become associated with membership perceptions and quality experiences (Smerdon, 2002). All students should be given equal opportunity to achieve to their maximum capability (Townsend, 2009).

Ellis, Hart, and Small-McGinley (2003) conducted a qualitative study utilizing student interviews at a Canadian alternative middle school. The data gathered were used to develop a video program called *Listen Up! Kids talk about teaching*. The researchers asked students for suggestions on improving classroom environments for students with the most challenging behaviors. Most of the participants stated the importance of respect by teachers. Caring, listening, and encouragement were included. As was frequently the case of students with disabilities, those with the highest needs received the least support.

Schools are not always conducive to supporting those most in need. Time after time, students with disabilities find themselves ostracized and expelled. Students with no feeling of belonging or of being wanted have little to no connections to school, learning, or a desire to succeed. This student to school disconnection frequently leads to dropping out of school or even more disturbing, entering the criminal justice system.

Belonging includes feelings of acceptance as a valued group member and a sense of security. Students, who perceive they do not belong, tend to give up sooner when work becomes harder. Students not included or allowed to participate in group activities miss out on important opportunities to learn and practice social skills (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). Support through differentiation, interventions, and assistance by adults in the school setting may facilitate students' ability to participate when it is structured, but adult involvement with unstructured activities can hinder the student with a disability from full participation and the ability to interact freely with other non-disabled peers. Erickson's 2005 study of over 400 students found those supported by assistants felt they had less independence suggesting that this extra support might also be a barrier to full membership.

Ware (2002) wondered why so many educators were, and continue to be, unaware of the many issues that revolve around including students with disabilities in the school community. Systemic barriers, the structures or processes that prevent full membership for students with disabilities, are part of the problem. Systemic barriers frequently include policies, procedures, and or practices that have developed over time. One example of a systemic barrier is that many educator preparatory programs may have set teachers up for failure when working with these students. Two different service models have been

presented, one for general education and one for special education (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheere, 1999). These two different pathways mean that general education teachers may not have received adequate training in strategies for supporting or understanding the needs of students with disabilities, creating negative views of inclusion (Engstrom, 2003). Another example of a systemic barrier revolves around classrooms. Classrooms have been private worlds where teachers ruled with complete autonomy and isolation. Norms of privacy have developed (Ripley, 1997). General education teachers often felt that having other individuals in the classroom encroached upon this locus of control. As schools evolve with more blended general and special education classrooms, as well as cultural and ethnic crossovers, teachers are being forced to adjust to sharing space and teaching time. This often results in a clash of personal values and perceptions, creating dissonance and conflict between teachers and students. Begley (2010) stated that this increasing diversity makes it important to develop sensitivity towards others in regards to education. Townsend (2009) mentioned that educators are change agents; "Teachers can develop positive attitudes, over time, when accompanied by professional development, administrative support, and collaboration strategies" (p. 73).

Past practices that provide an example of systemic barriers include denying students with disabilities access to the neighborhood school with their peer group. This researcher remembers being in second and third grades at her local primary school. There was a classroom at the end of the hall where a teacher and her helper worked with several high school students who were in wheelchairs or used walkers. My classmates and I never understood why high school students would be going to a primary school but when we asked, we were told they were "special children" and we should not to talk to them.

A final example of systemic barriers involves the limitation of class choices for students with disabilities. Excuses such as communication deficits, behavioral issues, or cognitive deficits are frequently used as reasons for these limitations. Eriksson (2005) conducted a study on the relationship between school environment and educational practices for students with disabilities. Using a questionnaire to survey more that 1000 students, teachers, and counselors to determine this relationship, it was interesting that the factors having the strongest correlation fell in the area of environmental support. This pointed to the need for additional human and material resources to support those students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Barriers to full membership for students with disabilities have included a lack of professional development to provide training and information on the ethical treatment of diverse populations in education, burdensome beliefs, low standards of leadership, and a lack of resources. An additional barrier was the impact that students with disabilities participating in general education classes had on school performance scores (Buell et al., 1999; Clampit et al., 2004).

Berger and Luckman (1966) reported that society builds agreement about reality through social networks. Over time, these agreements become perceived truths and dispositions that are then manifested in our everyday lives and thoughts. "Dispositions are manifested in the perspectives of stakeholders. These stakeholders then communicate points of view and the choice of context for opinions, beliefs, and attitudes based on lived or contrived experiences" (Townsend, 2009, p. 3). In consideration of students with disabilities, classrooms are small social networks that often reflect cultural perceptions of inequality, flawed character, and lesser human beings. This may be what led to separate

teacher education pathways and segregated classrooms for students with disabilities. Even in teacher preparation courses, post-secondary programs may not be addressing those ethical imperatives that revolve around self-reflection and how perspectives or presumptions of disabilities may impact decisions made when dealing with disabilities and differences. These pre-teachers may see these students as having personal problems (Ferri, 2008).

Multiple studies around the country have proven that full membership can be successful when certain supports are put into place. The first support relied on positive teacher attitudes (Clampit et al., 2004). Training in special education may lead to a better understanding of self, as well as students with disabilities. This training may lead to a resolution of personal conflicts and more positive interaction or collaboration practices (Kelly, 1980). Most educator training programs have followed two different paths with teachers being special or general education bound, learning two different service models (Buell et al., 1999). This set up the general education teacher for failure when implementing inclusion practices that involved working with special needs students. Many "non-special" educators do not understand why teachers of students with disabilities chose that career pathway. Perhaps these teachers chose to become special educators due to their value of compassion, seen as a need to improve educational outcomes. Perhaps they had a modicum of egocentrism, the internalized perception that they were the only ones who could help these children. Perhaps the completion of each educator's personal goals spurred them along that path (Kelly, 1980).

A large number of teachers are older and more experienced. Many were not trained during their coursework to understand the needs of, or how to work with, students

with disabilities. These teachers tend to view inclusion negatively (Engstrom, 2003). Competing personal and professional values may be a factor due to competition among cultures, community, and peer influences which shape attitudes and perceptions (Begley, 2010). The visible results and actions may be a direct result of the lack of understanding because of defective or absent knowledge. Sharing and collaborating to ensure positive educational outcomes for all students, with full access to the core curriculum, is an essential practice that should involve all educators and families. When teachers share their expertise with each other and the students they serve, more focused and informed decisions are made related to the needs of students, rather than to personal philosophies or values. One teacher cannot expect or be expected to meet the diverse needs of all students in the classroom (Dufour, 2011). Teachers need to work together and show others that everyone is part of a group even though all are different (Townsend, 2009).

Student membership in a learning community is a requirement for optimal learning. Focusing on the disability inhibits the ability of students with disabilities to develop relationships and understanding which then inhibits their ability to excel educationally, as well as to belong and be accepted. Williams and Downing (1998) conducted a large Canadian study utilizing survey data and found that perceptions of belonging among more than 16,000 middle school adolescents included feeling welcomed, wanted, and respected by teachers and other students. Students also mentioned the development of friendships, group belonging, feeling comfortable, and having fun were components of belonging.

While government has mandated inclusionary practices for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, schools have been slow to follow through.

A large number of students with disabilities are considered as resource students, placed in special education classrooms for a portion of the school day to receive specialized instruction and in general education classrooms for the another part of the day. Schnorr (1990) reported that these different elements of special education have a defining impact on students with disabilities. Students are often seen as visitors to the classroom. The student with a disability has little to no opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and misses many chances to be involved with non-disabled peers. Even when the student is learning in the same classroom, if instruction and materials are different from other students, the student with a disability is often considered an outsider and not included in the group norms or culture. Clampit et al. (2004) stated greater acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities occur when they are included in school-wide activities. Students themselves reported participation improved self-esteem and created positive learning environments for them. They developed lifelong interests, had non-disabled peer role models, were integrated into community life and learned meaningful skills that enabled them to be more productive citizens, something that cannot be provided in self-contained settings (Jorgensen et al., 2010). Kleinert et al. (1997) mentioned that students with disabilities need extensive opportunities to participate as well as instructional time with non-disabled peers to develop critical life skills. Without these opportunities, students often engage in solitary activities, lack friendships, and miss out on practicing acceptable social skills which would increase their chances for acceptance in the greater community. These opportunities are necessary to enable students with disabilities to develop their identity which is carved out of a patchwork of experiences, then pieced together to make the child whole (Ferri, 2008).

Pathways to Full Membership

Participation in general education classrooms has been connected to achievement and positive outcomes for students with disabilities. General education classrooms tend to spend more time on instruction and academic content than is done in special education classrooms. Full membership is positively influenced and supported by student learning environments, student interactions, accommodations, interventions, and supports provided to address the needs of students with disabilities throughout the school community (Jorgensen et al., 2010). To help teachers develop full membership opportunities, they need effective strategies for promoting participation. These should include critical skills necessary for belonging to peer and friend support networks, ensuring activities are meaningful for everyone involved and to reduce parallel learning (Kleinart et al., 2007).

Meaningful dialogue is required to promote participation. Using data driven conversations, teachers can improve student outcomes. Working collaboratively may help other teachers to embrace and utilize new approaches to learning and teaching practices (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Collaboration increases student achievement through the modeling of successful practices. The general education teacher often has subject matter expertise while the special education teacher focuses on specialized instruction through strategies and interventions designed to support the core curricular content, thereby making learning relevant or accessible for all (Milbury, 2005). When curriculum experts collaborate with strategic instructional experts (West Ed, 2004), behavior difficulties decrease, achievement levels increase, and students become motivated and enthusiastic about learning (Inger, 1999), while developing a stronger sense of self, increasing self-

esteem (Ripley, 1997), and developing the sense of belonging necessary to become full members of the school community.

Educational leaders are an important piece of the full membership puzzle when creating a community of learners for all children. They must have strong inclusive values, a desire to promote full membership for students with disabilities, a willingness to address and deal with conflict, along with a belief in the importance of parental or guardian participation. They should be asking what supports are needed to increase belonging and participation rather than asking if students with disabilities should be included in general education classrooms (Jorgenson et al., 2010). Leaders must be careful not to allow personal bias or perceptions to develop into systemic barriers (Podell & Soodak, 1993).

A principal is usually seen as the educational leader in the school setting. As such, he or she is directly tied to the culture of the school in which he or she leads. This culture, which is a set of tacit expectations and assumptions, are shaped by all the interactions of the members of that particular community (Hinde, 2004). Assumptions include those things we filter through the lenses of our own values and experiences. Culture can have a positive or negative influence on learning environments, positive in a shared commitment to high expectations for all students or negative in the lack of care or involvement in providing excellence in the service to students.

Lipsky and Gartner (1997) mentioned that best practices were at the center of full membership and the creation of a community of learners. Teachers may be the most important variable revolving around full membership for students with disabilities in public education (Sileo et al., 2008). Their willingness to work with diverse students may

rely on their beliefs in the ability to make change occur. Preconceptions tend to expedite decision making, thus creating opportunities that make bias more likely (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Education should focus on the whole child by cultivating skills, attitudes, and knowledge, then allowing time and opportunities for students to practice these across all domains. Educators must presume students with disabilities are able to learn and discuss age appropriate academic and social topics.

Teaching involves acceptable rules of conduct, societal customs, and behavioral principles. These rules, customs, and principles revolve around what is expected and accepted in society so that students will be accepted and included in greater society. Teachers should be guided by ethical standards to provide all students with high quality educational experiences to help them become productive citizens while improving democratic principles. The influence of teachers and their custodial responsibility for societal standards and values are important when educating children. This influence is a critical part of teacher awareness when considering how personal values impact daily decisions and how bias may be reflected in judgments. Recognizing, valuing, and demonstrating sensitivity to human diversity is crucial. Teachers' morals, values, and ethics impact how they interact with those who are different from their own background. Educators must also value all students as equal members in heterogeneous groupings throughout the school community (Sileo et al., 2008). This may best be accomplished through collaborative teaming and planning. Students with disabilities are frequently excluded from inclusive classes as well as non-academic activities in educational settings due to these multiple barriers (Erickson, 2005).

These examples are but a few highlights of the challenges and ethical issues surrounding full membership for students with disabilities. In an era of political, economic, and educational change that appears to be of global proportions, ethics and values sensitivity have begun to play an important part in acceptance and understanding of the changes taking place (Morgan & Leonard, 2012). A key to developing this sensitivity is dialogue, which unfortunately is often a missing link in the collaborative processes essential for successful inclusion (Smith & Leonard, 2005). Student diversity, increasing numbers of students with disabilities, and a desire to ensure success for all stakeholders necessitates educator collaboration, ongoing dialogue, and an understanding of differing values and perspectives. The ethical implication is clear: the words and actions of educators leave lasting impressions and shape the character of many students. When teachers share their expertise with each other and the students theyserve, more focused and informed decisions are made related to the needs of students and not personal philosophies or values. One teacher cannot expect to meet the diverse needs of all students in the classroom (Dufour, 2011).

Educational collaboration refers to the professional working relationship among teachers in which there are observable behaviors. It is a structured blending of experiences, professionalism, expertise, and instructional practices that frame the educational programs of students (West Ed, 2004). By working together, teachers help students to increase proficiency in teamwork abilities and develop important job skills for the future. Appropriate collaborative efforts will enable students to attain objectives in the curriculum while developing social and cooperative skills necessary for post-secondary life (Ediger, 2011).

Perceptual surveys conducted over the past 10 years found that many general and special education teachers felt positive about being able to influence students with disabilities but that they needed a voice in the decision making that affected their classrooms (Buell et al., 1999). They did not feel that general education classrooms could meet the needs of all students with disabilities (University of Kansas Medical Center, 2002). Being involved in the decision making that concerns classroom policies, instructional planning, and professional development topics would go a long way toward improving teacher attitudes. Many general educators felt students with disabilities are foisted upon them. Others felt the need to be empowered (Buell et al., 1999). Others even perceived collaboration as a sign of weakness meaning they were incapable of doing what was expected and that others felt they could not do their job (Kramer, 2004). Clampit et al. (2004) stated that greater acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities were advantages to inclusive practices. Students themselves reported that participation in the general education classroom improved their self-esteem and provided them with a more positive learning environment.

In a collaborative teaching model, knowledge, skills, resources, and expertise are combined to strengthen teaching and learning opportunities, methods, and effectiveness. According to Devito (2009), the fundamentals of collaboration include active listening and engagement to build trust and rapport, authentic interactions, respect for each other, positive attitudes, and focusing on results or outcomes. Research has proven that there are many benefits to collaborative practices.

Classroom learning activities are developed to be more appropriate to students' needs and abilities, enabling each to be challenged, yet able to participate in meaningful

ways (Ripley, 1997) while gaining educational benefit. Discussions about teaching practices through frequent, continuous, concrete, and meaningful dialogue is required. Using data-driven conversations, teachers can improve student outcomes. As previously mentioned, working collaboratively may help teachers to embrace and utilize new approaches toward learning and teaching practices (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Collaboration increases student achievement through the modeling of successful practices.

Collaborative efforts create and support diverse instructional environments (Smith, 2010) reducing the need for additional special education services not only benefiting students through highly qualified content instruction, but the district as well in terms of personnel needs and budgetary savings. Districts benefit from teacher collaboration as it is a critical component of professional learning communities, which to date have proven to be one of the most successful methods for improving student achievement.

The establishment of professional learning communities that focus on developing collaborative cultures can empower teachers, develop collegial trust, and provide a catalyst for organizational change and school improvement, which are linked to enhanced student outcomes (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Working as a true team is one of the most important components of a successful organization. Sharing ideas, developing objectives for students, and the best methods to attain them are results of that teamwork. Both special and general education teachers have unique talents to offer regarding instruction that will enhance students' abilities to gain meaningful curricular access.

Previous studies utilizing teacher interviews indicated multiple barriers to successful inclusion programs. These barriers included a lack of interest in professional development, ineffective or no training in special education or the needs of students with disabilities, poor leadership strategies, lack of dedication, burdensome beliefs and attitudes, poor communication, lack of support, lack of planning time, and collaboration. Additional barriers that were reported included the negative impact that students with disabilities had on the academic performance of students in both populations, possible litigation concerns, the extra workload and paperwork, the lack of resources, personnel, and time, as well as ensuring proper fit between teachers and students or teachers and teachers. Professional development continues to be a main area of need that was evident in the research. Training on disabilities and how to recognize the attributes of those disabilities with specific strategies necessary for supporting students was needed. Methods for adapting curricular and materials, along with alternative grading practices, and the management of challenging behaviors was desired (Buell et al., 1999; Carter & Hughes, 2006; Clampit et al., 2004; University of Kansas Medical Center, 2002).

Teachers, administrators, and district leaders have all had a hand in retarding the progress of collaboration, often due to different or fragmented visions and philosophies (Understanding Community Schools, 2011). Resistance to change is a major deterrent in the establishment of collaborative processes. Collaboration, while often seen as "common sense," actually takes effort and organization (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Begley (2010) mentioned that we look at situations through lenses, often based on our culture, experiences, and skills. Branson (2010) discussed five ethical perspectives that should be considered when contemplating full membership for students with disabilities. The ethic

of justice ensures that education is fair and equal for all. Educators should consider socio-economic status, gender, culture, and more when making decisions related to the ethic of critique. Reflection on the ethic of care and keeping a focus on the schools' responsibility to its stakeholders is important. Keeping the student at the center of all decisions is mentioned in the ethic of profession. Being able to make decisions on a regular basis, doing what is in the best interest of those involved is the ethic of personal moral integrity.

Summary of Chapter Two

Chapter two provided the historical development of special education. Details progressed to include the concept of full membership for students with disabilities. Full membership is more than just an educational continuum. It is the idea of including students with disabilities in all aspects of the school community as a fully participating member with a voice. Also discussed in this chapter were numerous barriers to the implementation of full membership practices including scripts of disability and systemic barriers that hinder progress and change for students in special education. This chapter ended with suggestions for alleviating the problems and barriers that slow down the implementation of full membership practices. Suggestions included professional development for general and special education teachers as well as collaboration and the establishment of professional learning communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction of Chapter Three

Chapter three provides insight into the reasons for the phenomenological

qualitative methodology chosen for this research project. Following this discussion are

sections describing purposeful sampling and data collection methods. Once data were

collected, data analysis procedures were followed, which are outlined in this chapter.

Chapter three ends with a discussion of trustworthiness of data and several possible

limitations to the transferability of any study findings.

Description of the Methodology

This study used qualitative methodology to answer the research questions.

Qualitative methodology is used when studying behavior in order to gain meaning from

experiences that created the behavior. Qualitative methodology interprets data knowing

that the reader constructs his or her own personal meanings based on personal realities

and perspectives (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Qualitative methodology is appropriate

when variables and relationships are unclear. As explained by Shank (2006), qualitative

methodology places the researcher at the center of discovery through the inquiry process

by revealing meaning through understanding. The inquiry process allows the researcher

and reader to see alternate views and perceptions of life and events. This methodology

provides insight into realities that quantitative methodology cannot.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the use of qualitative methodology is an attempt to "study things in their natural setting, making sense of, or interpreting, phenomena by the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding…that explores a social or human problem" (p. 15) using data collected through a variety of sources such as field notes, interviews, documents, and photographs. This form of research is useful when wanting to learn more about an issue without only yes or no answers. Qualitative research is open-ended and allows one to explore the issues being investigated through detailed descriptions and analysis of a phenomenon.

A qualitative approach best suited the purpose of this researcher. The goal was to gain an understanding of the experiences, concerns, and conflicts faced by general and special education teachers working with students having disabilities throughout the school community. The end result was to interpret those findings and provide suggestions for educational institutions to improve educational practices and increase positive student outcomes.

Comparatively, quantitative methodology is used when considering causal relationships rather than how human interactions and experiences play a role in relationships. Quantitative research uses preconceived ideas and theories regarding data, including what are to be gathered while qualitative research focuses on themes and patterns through the research process to generate theories or insights during data analysis. Finally, quantitative research uses statistical designs to develop objective reports focusing on quantifiable systems, which cannot always tell why a phenomenon occurs as it does (Gall et al., 2007).

While qualitative research is a methodology for gaining understanding of natural phenomena, there are several designs that are used for different research purposes and situations. Six qualitative research methodologies were considered. After careful consideration of each, the phenomenological methodology was chosen.

Grounded theory approach seeks to answer why certain phenomenon occur in order to develop a theory from those findings (McDuffie &Scruggs, 2008). This approach was not appropriate due to fact that the purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of general and special education teachers regarding full membership and belonging for students with disabilities without seeking a theory to explain.

The ethnography approach involves researcher participation and involvement as part of the social group or culture to better understand the phenomena and gain meaning. This approach is appropriate when wanting others to gain an understanding of a group or culture without actually being a part of the experience. Ethnography focuses on patterns, rituals, and ways of life (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Ethnography did not fit this study because of the possibility of researcher bias related to students with disability and the varying experiences of the participants. While this approach may have generated a behavioral description related to full membership and belonging based on the culture of an educational institution, it would not have served this researcher's purpose, which was to gain a deeper understanding and meaning of teachers' perceptions of what full membership means to students with disabilities in a school community.

Another qualitative design, the case study approach, intends to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in a specific location, a single subject, or event. The case study design is often utilized when wanting to develop a detailed description of a

phenomenon, develop possible explanations of it or to evaluate and suggest changes (Gall et al., 2007). While some aspects of the case study approach would have been useful for this study, the approach was not appropriate because the researcher did not intend to provide feedback to participants. This researcher desired to gain an understanding of the phenomenon without influencing responses from the participants (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004).

The use of a hermeneutic approach, the interpretation of written or observable messages, was also not considered (Gall et al., 2007). This researcher intended to gain an understanding of differing perspectives rather than interpreting a message. Finally, another qualitative research approach, biography, was not considered for this study due to the limited scope of its design. The focus of a biographical study is to explore the life of a single subject by providing a detailed narrative of his or her life (Creswell, 1998), which was not the intention of this study.

A phenomenology study focuses on making sense of lived experiences or situations and describes them in a meaningful way so as to understand the perspectives of those involved (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The phenomenological approach more appropriately met the goals of this researcher. The researcher gained a clearer, deeper understanding of general and special education teacher perspectives and lived experiences regarding full membership for students with disabilities without judging or presuming and controlling bias, while remaining open to emergent themes (Finlay, 2008).

A phenomenological methodology enabled this researcher to describe the participants' lived experiences as richly as possible while remaining neutral regarding the accuracy of the experiences described as a reflection of reality. Bias can be an infusion of

a researcher's opinions and prejudices into research findings based on his or her own personal experiences and beliefs. Bias can also be the distortion or falsification of facts based on a researcher's subjectivity. Control for bias was met through the construct of confirmability, which is addressed later in is this chapter.

The objective of this phenomenological study was to examine the perspectives and lived experiences of a group of southern American high school general and special education teachers by exploring themes and patterns derived from data to gain an understanding of possible barriers to providing students with disabilities full participating membership in secondary settings. Informed by significant conceptual aspects of full membership, challenges to be overcome that deter the provision of full membership for students with disabilities were explored and guided the research:

1. What are general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for student with disabilities?

2. What scripts of disability may be reflected in the general and special education teachers' practice?

3. What systemic barriers may exist in the high school community to prevent students with disabilities from having full membership?

Identification of common themes in teachers' perspectives and resistance to ensuring full membership for students with disabilities may inform leadership while resolving issues to maximize educational experiences for all learners. The idea behind full membership is to provide students with disabilities access to all areas of the school community, both inside and outside of the classroom.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), phenomenology is an attempt to gain meaning of lived experiences from the viewpoint of ordinary people involved in those experiences. This approach allowed the researcher opportunities to listen to those experiences. It produced an interpretation of reality, allowing the reader a way to understand the concept or phenomenon being studied.

Sample

The purposeful sampling strategy of criterion sampling was used to gain knowledge, specific to the research topic, by providing detailed, first hand experiential information. This method of sampling better enabled the researcher to obtain rich, detailed data regarding general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership and belonging for students with disabilities. Other methods and strategies for purposeful sampling were considered, including convenience sampling (participants chosen for availability and ease), theory-based sampling (participants chosen for a theoretical construct), and homogeneous sampling (limiting participants to only those reflective of a narrow study or single focus (Gall et al., 2007). Because this study intended to gain perspectives from both general education and special education teachers who had daily experiences and contact with students having disabilities, school administrators, and other school community stakeholders, none of the aforementioned strategies were deemed appropriate.

The participants in this study were a representative sample of certified or highly qualified general and special education high school teachers from two area schools in the southern region of the United States. A total of fourteen high school teachers were chosen to participate. There were nine special education teachers and five general education

teachers in the participant sample. While the high schools were located within the same district, the school communities represented a blending of different socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups. This population included teachers from both genders, diverse ethnic backgrounds, and with various experience levels.

A phenomenological sample size is recommended to be at least 10 participants (Creswell, 1998). Limiting the sample to teachers having experience with students with disabilities provided a richer representation of their perspectives and experiences (Donalek, 2004) regarding full membership and belonging.

Ethical Consideration

A detailed outline of this dissertation study was submitted to the University's Internal Review Board and approved by the Human Use Committee. After making requested revisions, the study was approved (see Appendix A). A Letter to Superintendent (see Appendix B) and informed consent form (see Appendix C) were delivered to the superintendent of the school district where the study was conducted. The letter of introduction served to introduce the researcher and purpose for the study. The consent form outlined the planned research procedures and voluntary nature of the teachers invited to participate, including their rights and guarantee of confidentiality regarding responses and the resulting data gathered.

Data Collection Methods and Recording

The researcher began the data collection process by personally contacting the principals of the identified schools. Since the researcher was known to these administrators, this meeting was sufficient to introduce the study topic and provide an introductory packet of information which included (a) a letter of introduction regarding

the study and its topic, and (b) a copy of the Informed Consent Letter. Once permission to conduct the study was granted by the school principals, the researcher contacted the teachers to be interviewed. Email invitations were sent to participants and follow-up phone calls were made. Meetings were scheduled with each individual participant. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. Each interview began with an introduction of the researcher, explanation of the study, and a copy of the Informed Consent Form. The Informed Consent Form outlined the context of the study, the interview process, participant rights, and confidentiality. The introductory letter was composed by the researcher and provided a short synopsis of the intended study with a request for permission to interview the chosen teachers at the sites.

Once agreement was obtained from the participants, data were collected through audio recorded, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Interviews consisted of one 45-60 minute interview. An interview protocol (see Appendix D) developed by the researcher, contained 24 open-ended questions. Sub-questions were utilized when clarification or additional information was desired. Prior to participant interviews, the researcher practiced using the interview protocol with several colleagues to determine if any changes in phrasing, ambiguity, or clarity were necessary. Participants were encouraged to provide their opinions, perspectives, insights, and perspectives of full membership and belonging for students with disabilities in the school community. Interviews were scheduled during pre-arranged planning periods of the teachers' choosing in order to minimize disruptions to the teachers' work day and student instructional time. The interviews took place in a secluded, private location of the teachers' choosing.

Once interviews were completed, the recorded information was transcribed, stored on data keys, and kept in a locked file for confidentiality purposes. Interviewees were assigned an alias to protect identities, as well as to provide confidentiality. The researcher maintained a list of participants' names and identifying codes.

Descriptive and reflective field notes were taken throughout the interviews. Field notes allowed the researcher to record verbal behaviors and reactions or "word pictures" that provided additional insight during data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews were transcribed verbatim to provide useable data for analysis. Hand coding with marginal notes was incorporated. Through the use of participant quotes, as well as emergent themes and patterns, evidence of different perspectives was revealed. Additional reasons for taking field notes included the opportunity for personal reflection during the interview and observation process while helping to identify areas that may have needed additional clarification.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommended beginning researchers use an "analysis in the field" strategy. This involved performing ongoing data collection, analysis, and interpretation during the interview process. This strategy helped narrow the focus of this study so it became more manageable.

Once data were gathered, analysis followed. Data analysis, the process of organizing the vast amount of information gathered during the interview and observation phase of this study,enabled the researcher to identify themes, patterns, and constructs. The analysis process provided insight into perspectives, beliefs, and biases of general and special education teachers in relation to full membership in the school community for

students with disabilities. Multiple questions presented during interviews and analyzed

using mixed coding categories provided stronger triangulation of the information

gathered. Coded categories, some of which developed during the gathering stage, were

created utilizing the themes and patterns that were revealed as data were sorted. The

researcher expected categories to be mixed. Categories emerged such as participant

perspectives or beliefs, school experiences, processes, and relationships.

Field notes and interviews were typed in order to sort, code, interpret, and identify

patterns. Descriptive, reflective field notes and observer comments during interviews

provided the researcher with opportunities to record insights and ideas as they developed

so they were not forgotten. These notes provided immediate opportunities for clarifying

questions during interviews as well as information to make necessary connections to

current literature, critical issues, and different responses from participants during the

formal analysis phase. Borg et al. (2007) also stressed the importance of detailed,

concrete field notes and visual reminders to help avoid vague, over-generalized data

gathering.

Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness of data refers to the rigorous framework qualitative researchers

use to ensure validity and reliability (Shenton, 2004). Reliability relates to how consistent

research findings would be if different researchers conducted similar studies or the same

individual replicated the same study after a period of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Validity refers to the high standards of methods and procedures used during the study to

ensure quality and vigor. Qualitative researchers tend to be more interested in rich, thick

data and the accuracy of reporting that data with the aim of supporting the argument that

the findings are of importance. Of more relevance in a qualitative study are the constructs developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four constructs are aligned with the criteria used to determine trustworthiness in quantitative research (i.e., internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity).

Credibility, as likened to internal validity, is confidence in how true the findings from a study are. Through prolonged engagement in the interview process (to detect and account for distortion of information, build trust and confidence, as well as the ability to understand the context of the setting), triangulation of data (to provide rich robust comprehensive and well developed account of the study's findings), and peer debriefing (in order to uncover bias and assumptions), the researcher provided credibility in the reported findings.

Transferability, as compared to external validity, refers to how applicable the findings of a study will be in other contexts beyond the boundary of the current proposal. The construct of transferability was met through the thick rich description and detailed account of the researcher's field experiences.

Dependability, as related to reliability, is the assessment of the quality of the integrated data collection, analysis, and generated theory with many detailed descriptions so that the research may be replicated. Dependability was met through external audits by the researcher's colleagues, not involved in this study, who examined the process and product of this study to provide feedback to the researcher.

Confirmability, as related to objectivity, consists of demonstrating how well the findings are supported by data. This construct acknowledges bias and works to ensure

that findings are the result of experiences and participant responses, not the researcher's opinions and beliefs, as well as addressing the researcher's own preconceptions. Confirmability was met through an audit trail of notes, summaries, coding processes, and products to control for researcher bias. Another method for controlling bias was the use of reflexivity to report the researcher's perspectives, beliefs, and values that came into play during the research process.

Limitations

The data gathered were limited in that the researcher conducted a small study with only 14 participants at only two high schools. Only one district, in one region, in one state, also limited the study. This limits the transferability of findings or conclusions to other schools or districts. Previous research showed that barriers to full membership may be related to specific school cultures. Different schools may determine a variety of findings. The sample size is limited in that only two high schools were included and only fourteen teachers participated in this study. Of the fourteen teachers who participated, there were only five general education teachers in the study. The limited number of perspectives may not have given a complete rendering of full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. This may also have resulted in a limited amount of actual data to show a true picture of teachers' perspectives and full membership. Administrators play a large part in the decision-making component of full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. Additional insight may have been gained if they had been interviewed during the research study. Observations conducted in the classrooms where general and special education teachers taught may have provided additional insight and a better understanding of some of the responses regarding the teachers' perspectives.

Additional research in how class sizes, student ratios related to non-disabled versus disabled students, and actual teaching time may also have resulted in different findings regarding full membership opportunities for students with disabilities.

Summary of Chapter Three

Chapter three provided a description of the qualitative methodology that was used to conduct this research study. A discussion of the various approaches and a rationale for utilizing a phenomenological approach were provided. Sample size was discussed as well as data collection and analysis methods. The chapter ended with a discussion of the constructs that were used to ensure trustworthiness of the data gathered, analyzed, and reported in this research study. A final section regarding the possible limitations ensued.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction of Chapter Four

Chapter four provides the results of this research study. After a review of the study's purpose, there is a discussion of the schools' demographics and description of the participants' backgrounds. Data related to each of the interview questions is presented sequentially. Analysis of the gathered data is provided along with thick, rich, descriptive text giving voice to the teachers that participated in this study.

Results

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of the perspectives general and special education teachers had regarding full membership for students with disabilities. Three research questions guided the study:

1. What are general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities?

2. What scripts of disability may be reflected in the general and special education teachers' practice?

3. What systemic barriers may exist in the high school community to prevent students with disabilities from having full membership?

To answer the three research questions, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a total of fourteen general and special education teachers from two

area high schools. Interview data were qualitatively analyzed using an inductive approach. The findings provided insight into the perspectives, beliefs, and biases of general and special education teachers in relation to full membership in the school community for students with disabilities.

School number one was a high performing school consisting of 72 general, special, and specialized content teachers. Student enrollment was more than 1200 with 7% being counted as having disabilities. The mobility rate at the time of this study was 12% with a racial make-up of 46% Caucasian, 50% African-American, and 4% other ethnicities. School number two was low performing consisting of 69 general, special, and specialized content teachers. Student enrollment consisted of 1100 with 13% of the population having disabilities. The mobility rate at this school was 45% with a racial make-up of 99% African-American students.

There were eight teachers of Caucasian descent and six teachers of African-American descent that participated. Eight teachers from school number one participated in this study. Three teachers were certified content-specific general education teachers and five teachers were certified in special education. Of the general education teachers, teacher number one was certified in math and physics with eight years of teaching experience, teacher number two was certified in English, also with eight years of teaching experience, and teacher number three was certified in history and had been teaching for nine years. Throughout the remainder of this document, these teachers will be referred to as GED #1-1, GED #1-2, and GED #1-3 respectively. Of the special education teachers interviewed, teacher number one was certified in special education as well as biology. This teacher had been teaching for three years. Teacher number two was certified in

special education and social studies with eight years of experience. Teacher number three was certified in special education and business education with twenty-nine years of experience. Teacher number four was also certified in special education and social studies, as was teacher number two, but had more than thirty years of teaching experience. Teacher number five was certified in special and general elementary education with twenty-two years of teaching experience. These teachers will be referred to SPED #1-1, SPED #1-2, SPED #1-3, SPED #1-4, and SPED #1-5 throughout the remainder of this document.

Six teachers participated in this study from school number two. Two were certified in general education and four were special education certified. General education teacher number one was certified in math and science with seven years of math experience and four years' experience teaching science. General education teacher number two was certified in social studies and had been teaching for twenty-one years. These teachers will be referred to as GED #2-1 and GED #2-2 for the remainder of this document. Special education teacher number one was certified in special education but did not share how many years of experience had been gained, even though asked. Special education teacher number two had been teaching special education for fifteen years. Special education teacher number three had fourteen years of experience, while special education teacher number four was certified in counseling and special education with four years of experience. These teachers will be referred to as SPED #2-1, SPED #2-2, SPED #2-3, and SPED #2-4 for the remainder of this document.

The beginning of each interview session focused on building trust and rapport. Teachers were asked their job titles, years of experience, and areas of certification. At the

end of each interview period, teachers were given the opportunity to share additional thoughts and information related to full membership at their respective school site.

It was interesting to note the variety of roles teachers reported that they fulfilled at their respective sites. The majority of special education teachers at both sites saw themselves as only teachers, defining their roles by reporting their specific title such as inclusion teacher or co-teacher. All of the general education teachers extended their roles to include facilitator of learning, guide, motivator, encourager, and character builder. Only one general education teacher and one special education teacher included the role of helping students with goal setting and post-secondary planning. This may be an area needing further study to compare student success rates and teacher roles.

Interview data were clustered according to the three research questions pertaining to teacher perspectives of full membership, scripts of disability, and systemic barriers. The data analysis process allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns from responses related to educational ethical issues that may need to be addressed in order to achieve full membership in schools that would benefit all students, including those with disabilities. The process began with an analysis of field notes taken during the interview process.

The next step involved transcribing recorded teachers' responses to interview questions. Sorting and coding of the gathered data was completed by developing a matrix (see Table 1) for each protocol question and teachers' responses. Coding of data provided the researcher with opportunities to identify pertinent information related to the research questions. Labels were applied as general indicators to help determine if interview responses were of relevance to the protocol questions. Themes were then developed by

sorting coded data into related topics. Use of matrices to organize real-world data allowed

the researcher to combine the interview responses from multiple participants into a visual

table, using the gathered information to identify emerging patterns and themes.

Visualizing the gathered data enabled the researcher to be immersed in the responses

provided by participants while allowing for reflection of said data. Findings provided rich

insight into educators' perceptions of full membership while identifying scripts of

disabilities and systemic barriers evident at each school site.

Table 1

Example Matrix of Interview Responses

Ques. 1:	What is your role as an educator in your school?	Teacher	Facilitator	Future	Inspire
SPED 1-1	Co-Teacher	X			
SPED 1-2	Guide-Focus on Learning & Goal Setting		X	X	
SPED 1-3	Life Skills Teacher	X		X	
SPED 1-4	Help students in a way most successful				
SPED 1-5	Teacher	X			
SPED 2-1	Learning facilitator, guide, motivate, inspire		X		X
SPED 2-2	Inclusion teacher	X			
SPED 2-3	Inclusion teacher	X			
SPED 2-4	Inclusion teacher	X			
GED 1-1	Prepare for next step in course work or college			X	
GED 1-2	Promote lifelong learning, leadership, character, facilitator		X	X	
GED 1-3	Learning facilitator, guide, motivate		X		X
GED 2-1	Learning facilitator		X		
GED 2-2	Prepare students for life, motivate, encourage				X

The following sections provide a summary of findings from this analytical

process. Each section addresses one of the research questions and any themes that

became evident during transcriptions and coding. The three major sections are organized by research questions revolving around teacher perspectives, scripts of disability, and systemic barriers. Participant's own words were used as evidence in support of the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Verbatim quotes were included to provide teacher voice and support of data summarization.

Teacher Perspectives of Full Membership

Research question one focused on general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities. Janet Napolitano, United States Secretary of Homeland Security, stated that "public schools were designed as the great equalizers of our society--the place where all children could have access to educational experience." Ensuring full membership for students with disabilities would provide this equal access, improving educational outcomes and opportunities for these students.

The teacher interview protocol contained several questions specifically written to gain information from participants directly tied to teachers' perspectives. Information asked of the participants included explaining what full membership meant in relation to participating in the school community, how they saw students with disabilities in terms of being members of classes, how they felt about students with disabilities participating in school-wide activities, what involvement students with disabilities should have within the school, and what they perceived as limitations for students with disabilities to fully participate in the educational experience.

Responses to these questions provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore and analyze these perceptions. Teachers' personal experiences in regards to

exposure to students with disabilities and these students' needs were examined. While two different high schools were involved in this study, the researcher did not identify any major differences in reactions and responses during interviews. Both groups of teachers from both sites gave similar responses to all questions which made school comparisons difficult. Based on this, the researcher did not address different school cultures and student populations. This might well be served in another research study.

Teacher interview responses to the protocol questions related to research question number one were categorized into themes that became evident during data analysis. Themes that specifically related to teachers' perspectives of full membership included: (a) belief in the rights of full membership for students with disabilities; (b) a lack of exposure to students with disabilities during formative years; (c) desire for parental involvement and communication; and (d) agreement among interviewees of general and special education teacher roles when working with students having disabilities.

The Rights of Full Membership for Students with Disabilities. Overall, both general and special education teachers at both sites felt that full membership allowed everyone to be involved in all aspects of the school community. This was identified as theme number one. The majority of general and special education teachers interviewed felt that all students should be able to participate and deserved equal treatment. Full membership builds from school to neighborhood to community and beyond. Full membership also involves relationship building. General education teacher (GED) #1-2 succinctly stated it as "students with disabilities are valuable members of the classroom and community, providing opportunities for all students to build tolerance and awareness of the differences in people." Only two special education teachers had differing answers.

SPED #1-2 did not understand the question and SPED #1-5 responded, "I don't know if that (full membership) would be applied to our students. In my opinion, their needs cannot be met in the regular classroom. Full membership is wonderful, but we need to determine if it will help self-esteem."

Teachers did give different reasons for supporting their responses to believing in full membership. GED #2-2 responded that it "is a human and civil right." GED #1-2 stated that it provided "opportunities for students to be seen without having a disability." The same two special education teachers that previously responded with differing answers responded differently here as well. SPED #1-2 was unable to give a clear response due to not being able to figure out what the concept of full membership meant. SPED #1-5 mentioned that participation was acceptable only "if the contribution the students can give is meaningful and good for the school and community."

When asked about concerns regarding full membership, six special education teachers responded with "none" while the remaining teachers had mixed responses. These included expectations being too high, behavioral issues, student embarrassment, and student health needs. GED #2-2 responded that a "40 watt bulb is not as strong or bright as a 60 watt bulb." This teacher alluded to the high expectations sometimes held for students to perform. A final response from SPED #1-5 revolved around the negative treatment of students with disabilities by other peers such as ridicule and bullying.

While the general premise among both general and special education teachers was that students with disabilities should have full membership opportunities, there was a wide range of understanding as to what full membership means. The researcher provided

basic information when needed to clarify the meaning of full membership. There was also confusion when considering who is responsible and what it involves.

Lack of Exposure to Students with Disabilities. Theme number two, lack of exposure to students with disabilities, became evident when general and special education teachers were asked about their personal experiences in high school. Interviewees were asked how students with disabilities were taught when they were in high school. All but two general education teachers reported that there were no students with disabilities in their classrooms or their school. This lack of exposure to students with disabilities was a recurring theme prevalent throughout the teachers' responses to the protocol questions. Responses frequently included such comments as "Students were taught in isolation, not in the general population. We saw very little of them" was shared by SPED #1-1 and SPED #2-1, who also stated, "I think all grades may have gone to one teacher. A lot of different abilities and types clumped together." SPED #2-2 mentioned that "students were separated. We knew nothing about inclusion. They were in their own classes and we had very little contact." SPED #2-3 did not remember any students with disabilities in high school. This teacher said that, "in college they were in different areas of the campus, in the basement or across the property, away from the general group of students." GED #2-1 said that "students were housed in temporary buildings outside of the main buildings." Only two general education teachers reported having any type of contact with students with disabilities. GED #1-1 stated that students were only "included for enrichment integration. They (students with disabilities) only joined us for physical education and other electives. We knew they had their own classes and that's just the way it was." GED #1-3 responded:

I come from a Chicago suburb. My school was ranked very high. My parents move out of the city to go to this school. We had one little girl with a walker, one who was blind and used a Braille keyboard, and one deaf child. We had physical disabilities only, no learning disabilities. I never really thought about that.

This lack of exposure to students with disabilities during the teachers' formative years may be one reason for differing perspectives in some responses.

Lack of exposure to students with disabilities was also evident in teachers' responses to what methods they learned in their teacher preparation courses for educating diverse learners. Only three teachers were able to name any specific methods or strategies for working with diverse learners. Every other teacher's response revolved around learning methods in their own classroom and on-the-job experiences. SPED #1-3 stated, "I taught myself in the classroom. My university courses emphasized meeting the needs of students, but no specific methods were taught on how to do it." Only two general education teachers and one special education teacher, GED #1-3, GED #2-2, and SPED #1-5 were able to name specific strategies they had gained experience with during their teacher preparation coursework. These strategies included role play, visuals, poster presentations, hands-on activities, sensory activities, teaching to different learning styles, and cooperative learning strategies. This lack of teacher training may be one reason for limited membership opportunities for students with disabilities in schools.

Parental Involvement and Communication. Parental involvement and engagement in education is one of the principles set forth by Black and Burello (2010). Parents and guardians should be encouraged to participate in the educational practices of

their children through dialogue, discussions, and encouraged involvement which points out theme number three. The overwhelming majority of responses from both school sites and both groups of teachers reported that parental involvement had a major impact and influenced a student's educational success. Statements included such responses as SPED #1-2's, "Higher parental involvement equals higher grades and better students" and GED #1-1's statement that, "If parents would show support and stress the importance of education at home, students would value learning. It would make teaching easier and more meaningful for student learning." SPED #2-4 succinctly stated it as:

> 90% of the home environment affects school outcomes. If students are not supported and reinforced at home for the learning they get at school, what is being taught is often wasted. I have three or four parents who are actually interested. They will call and call to get me. They will even come to school to hunt me down. Unfortunately, most of my contacts are negative. I would like them to be more positive.

While various studies by researchers have brought about the importance of parental involvement in education, teachers are prone to avoiding parental contact unless for negative reasons, including discipline. But when analyzing gathered data related to how much parental contact the general and special education teachers made in order to gain parental involvement and support, the majority of teachers felt they were too busy to make regular attempts at contacting parents. Most of the teachers attempted to make some type of contact, but this contact tended to fall into the area of sending progress reports and report cards home during the year. SPED #2-4 and GED #2-1 said, "I send progress reports on a regular basis." Special education teachers would contact parents for

a once-a-year meeting to write an individual education plan, but frequently, parents did not attend. SPED #1-5 even had students write their own memos because of the lack of time the teacher had for sending written communication home to parents. Only three general education teachers said they made more negative than positive contact with parents such as GED #1-1's comment that "contacts were 25% positive to 75% negative." Teachers reasoning came from the number of disconnected phone numbers they called and the working single parents who were rarely available. These comments came from teachers working at both school sites. There was supporting evidence that teachers continued to make communication attempts. They used a variety of methods to attempt contacting parents that ranged from email to text messaging to phone calls. GED #1-3 was using a telephone application to post reminders for homework, upcoming tests, and even for sending positive messages to parents and students. SPED #2-3 mentioned using a cell phone to make parental calls:

> I even call regular education students' parents if I have their number. I even call parents when I am in the classroom. I tell them I will even go to their house. I was raised in the 'hood. I am not afraid to go there. I don't call everyday, but on a regular basis. Parents feel comfortable talking to me and students do better.

While teachers felt that a lack of parental involvement was a problem when ensuring full membership for students with disabilities, the involvement that these two schools sought was minimal and impersonal. Contact was reduced to reasons related to homework or behavioral issues. Perhaps Epstein's (2003) framework for parental involvement would provide schools and teachers with ideas for increased opportunities that would open the door to communication and involvement of parents in the school

community, thereby increasing full membership opportunities for students with disabilities.

General and Special Education Teacher Roles. The final theme that became evident during data analysis was an understanding of the different roles general and special education teachers play in the education of students with disabilities. Perspectives can be determined by the role we perceive we have in educating students with disabilities. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook (2012), special education teachers, in an inclusive setting, ensure that lessons and teaching strategies are modified to meet the needs of students with disabilities. General education teachers, in the high school setting, teach subject specific content designed to assist all students in the classroom with the lessons and skills necessary to be successful in college and the job market.

When interviewed, the majority of teachers' responses were in agreement with that of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The role of the general education teacher was to address curriculum while collaborating and working together with the special education teacher. Most of the teachers felt that the role of the special education teacher was to support and accommodate. Only one teacher, GED #1-1, felt that the special education teacher had seventy-five percent of the responsibility for helping students with disabilities. It was refreshing to this researcher to note that all teachers involved in this study had a clear understanding of the roles of both general and special education teachers in the inclusive classroom community. Working together, both sets of teachers were able to view the students as ours, not yours or mine. It was evident that the majority of teachers in both groups espoused values reflective of the principles of full membership

for students with disabilities. GED #2-1 said, "The general education teacher's role is to make sure they learn the content. The special education teacher should help with tiering lessons, breaking concepts into smaller parts." GED #1-3 stated that "the general and special education teachers are partners, helping students with disabilities without identifying them, helping them to keep a low profile to avoid stigma." SPED #1-3, SPED ##2-1, and SPED #2-2 all said the general education teacher teaches the lesson. The special education teacher gives support, collaborates, and works with small groups of students, not just students with disabilities. There was one teacher whose answer did not reflect that of the others in what teachers felt were the roles of the special and general education teacher. As mentioned previously, GED #1-1 responded that; "the special education teacher has seventy-five percent of the responsibility for the outcomes and support of students with disabilities in the classroom. It's our job to work as a team to support those students. It is certainly my responsibility, but it is more theirs." Overall, participants fully understood what their roles were when working with students with disabilities.

What are general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities? Based on the data, a summary of what was gathered could be developed that states: full membership is important and a deserved right of all students as long as the students are cognitively able to participate and follow the appropriate social rules. The school community must rally together to ensure that the necessary supports are put into place including specially trained general and special education teachers along with peer mentors to ensure success for everyone involved.

Scripts of Disability

A script of disability is the labeling of a student by his or her identified or perceived disability which can result in the denial of acceptance, inclusion, or full membership in the school community (Black & Burello, 2010). These scripts have shaped professional practice, reactions, and behaviors in educational settings, in turn, creating negative school cultures. These practices, reactions, and behaviors have also shaped teachers' beliefs in how students with disabilities are able to perform in educational settings. Scripts of disability have come about due to the influence of institutionalized ideas about the natural limitations of those who are different, defective, or damaged. Therefore, students are forced to conform to the script we perceive them to have or that they have been labeled (Ware, 2002). Both groups of teachers at both schools responded to questions that labeled students with disabilities.

When asked about expectations for students with disabilities to be involved in full membership opportunities, there was a 50-50 split in responses. SPED #1-5, SPED #2-1, SPED #2-2, SPED #2-3, SPED #2-4, GED #1-3, and GED #2-2 all responded that there should be realistic expectations, but that those expectations should be different based on the students' disability and their individual goals. SPED #1-5 said, "Expectations have to be in accordance with their own limitations. Our expectations must be in line with what they can do without limiting the possibility of achieving higher. They need to be realistic expectations, but not limited." SPED #1-1, SPED #1-2, SPED #1-3, SPED #1-4, GED #1-2, and GED #2-1 all said the expectations for general and special education students should be equal. GED #1-1 put it bluntly. "Everyone should master the material being taught or they don't belong in my class."

Both sets of teachers expressed limitations that revolved around scripts of disability. When asked what limitations they perceived to full membership for students with disabilities, six teachers responded that the student's disability was a limitation. SPED #1-1, SPED #1-3, SPED #1-5, SPED #2-1, SPED #2-3, and GED #1-3 all mentioned the students' disability, cognitive ability, inability to communicate, behavior concerns, or inability to be socially acceptable as limitations. This was the only theme clearly identified throughout the data analysis of these questions.

Responses from special education teachers included; SPED #2-2 commented, "I try to have equal expectations but students with disabilities are different." SPED #2-4 felt "their exceptionality prevents them from keeping up." SPED #2-1 said, "It depends on their ability to learn." General education teachers such as GED #2-2 responded, "I am satisfied if they come to class and try." GED #1-3 mentioned that, "It depends on the students' own limitations. Our expectations must be in line with what they can do. They need realistic expectations." This split was also evident when teachers were asked what should be considered when encouraging students with disabilities to participate in classroom activities. Responses that revolved around a student's disability included SPED #1-5's comment that "we need to consider the student's level of functioning and his or her ability to interact appropriately with others," and GED #1-1's response that "we need to make sure the student knows his own limitations," and "we need to identify the disability." Responses that did not focus on a script of disability included; GED #2-2's response, "never say can't," and SPED #1-1's statement that " We need to know what is encouraging to them." SPED #2-3 included, "helping them build on their strengths to overcome limitations would help" and SPED #1-2 felt that "providing peer groups and

peer mentors would be an encouraging way to get them involved and overcome limitations."

Scripts of disability were also evident in the teachers' responses to problems they could foresee in regards to including students with disabilities in the school community. The overall consensus between the general and special education teachers revolved around the idea that full membership was not for all students. Almost all teachers in both groups at both schools mentioned the student's stage of development, behavior disorders, or the limitations of the disability being a problem when considering full membership opportunities and involvement for students with disabilities. SPED #1-5 mentioned student "knowledge levels." GED # 1-1 replied that, "the students' social skills disability makes it difficult to include students with disabilities." GED #2-1 said that a "students' stage of development and emotional maturity are deterrents." GED #1-3 touched on student perceptions:

> I think only student perceptions deny full membership. Sometimes labeling them is just as disabling as not being labeled. Many of my students have been in special education so long they no longer believe they can do things on their own. They often never get out of special education. Sometimes they get too comfortable and use the disability as a crutch.

There were a few comments alluding to other reasons for not providing full membership opportunities. GED #2-2 said, "There is a need for more individualized support. School personnel need to have a willing attitude and be more open-minded." GED #1-2 related that the "lack of staff to support students means we keep them isolated. We are content with that." SPED #2-4 stated that "teacher mindset and the lack of

willingness to work with special education students" was an obstacle that denied full

membership opportunities. SPED #2-2 echoed this sentiment with the statement, "School

personnel need to have a willing attitude and be more open-minded."

These scripts of disability and the idea that a student with a disability has a

deficiency may lower expectations denying full membership opportunities to students

with disabilities. These mixed responses demonstrate the need for additional training in

the idea of full membership and what having a disability means as it relates to what

students with disabilities can and cannot do.

What scripts of disability are reflected in the general and special education

teachers' practice in the high school community? Teachers may very well be one of the

main deterrents to more students with disabilities being included as full members in the

school community. The focus on students' disabilities, rather than abilities and strengths,

hold students back from successful integration in the school community. Teachers'

lowered expectations deter improved and positive outcomes along with the acceptance of

students with disabilities by other school stakeholders. A lack of exposure to students

with disabilities during formative years and during teacher preparation coursework may

be reasons for this stigma. Suggestions for overcoming these two areas will be presented

in chapter five.

Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers in schools are related to policies, procedures, and or practices

that may unfairly exclude certain groups from taking part in all aspects of the educational

community. An example of a systemic barrier came to light during a recent school visit in

the district involved in this study. A principal wanted visitors to the campus to be able to

find their way around the school site. Therefore, the principal labeled all hallways with the type of classes to be found in each hallway of the school. Of relevance here is that the principal had even labeled the special education hallway. This policy underscored not only a systemic barrier to full membership but the use of scripts of disability as well. Once pointed out to the principal that the sign was negatively labeling students, the signs were removed from the hallways.

Full membership overcomes systemic barriers by placing students at the front of all decisions. Black and Burello (2010) wrote that "there is shared understanding when all voices are heard and come to better decisions while improving democratic and citizenship skills" (p. 6). Overcoming barriers that deny students with disabilities exposure and access to all school organizations, opportunities, and programs improves students' chances at quality of life experiences.

Several questions were asked of study participants that involved administrative leader practices and possible systemic barriers to full membership. Questions included barriers and obstacles to full membership, limitations for students with disabilities to fully participate in the education experience, and administrative attitudes toward students with disabilities and full membership. During data analysis, no specific themes related to these questions became evident. Perhaps these practices were so deeply ingrained in the educational process, teachers were unaware of these barriers. Additional time spent in the field conducting observations may have helped to identify these deeply engrained procedures or practices.

Specially designed programming to support the numerous educational and physical support needs of students with disabilities may actually deny full membership

opportunities. The wide gap that has often been seen between general and special education may be part of the problem. While meant to assist struggling learners with disabilities by educating them in smaller group settings with slower pacing and targeted accommodations, taking them out of the mainstream has also taken them out of the sight and experiences of those who might be able to help the most. Teachers in this study were from different areas of the United States and from different generations yet their shared experiences demonstrated the prevalence for separate educational systems in this country. SPED #1-5's experience was from small town living in the 1950s and 1960s. "Students with disabilities weren't even identified. I remember students struggling, but there were no services. There was no segregation evident though. They may have been held back, I don't know." Only two general education teachers remembered having contact with students having disabilities. GED #1-3 went to high school in the 1980s and had experience with physically disabled students and mentioned a resource setting for students with disabilities where they received their "core subject instruction in a specialized setting and electives such as physical education, music, and art with their non-disabled peers." GED #2-2 had students with disabilities in the high school but "they were self-contained."

When asked about the role school systems should play in full membership opportunities, general education and special education teachers from both schools responded. SPED #1-1 said "School is the catalyst that sets the tone, focusing on students first. We have to be the one who talks about it from very angle. We spend more time with the kids than parents do. We don't have to initiate it, but we have to build it." GED #1-3

stated, "The administration sets the tone and it trickles down from there." SPED #2-2 felt that:

It [school] plays an important role. Unfortunately, I am in a school where the children's perceptions aren't great. They don't think much about themselves. They often put their peers down to lift themselves up. There has to be a connection to self, yet they have to know they represent their school as well.

One of the general education teachers, #2-2 said it clearest with the statement:

It is important to get the involvement of students in academics and extracurricular activities to keep them engaged and actively challenged. This allows students who may not be good in academics to find or show strengths in other areas that they may or may not know about. This helps them to be a part of the environment. It also helps them to develop self-discipline and pride in their accomplishments.

The school, meaning administration, must be the role model that sets this tone. The principal's leadership sets the climate for learning and the degree of concern for students' achievement (Hinde, 2004). This then filters down to teachers and other stakeholders in the system. The values and beliefs of the administration may influence the perspectives of teachers towards full membership for students with disabilities (Sergiovanni, 2006).

The only systemic barrier that was evident and mentioned previously revolved around parental involvement. Teachers and administrators tended to make minimal contact with parents unless for negative reasons. Frequently stated by all teachers was the lack of ability to contact parents due to disconnected numbers or the lack of time to make contact. Perhaps administrative leader practices should encourage a number of different

forms of participation for parents that involve them more as educational partners than as just home supporters or disciplinarians. Black and Burello (2010) include parents or guardians in the concept of full membership. By encouraging parents to be fully participating members of the school community and engaging in the dimensions of their students' education, school leaders and teachers may find students to be more productive and motivated to achieve higher levels of learning and strive toward increased academic performance.

All but one general education teacher felt the administration was positive about including students with disabilities in all aspects of the school community. GED #1-3 said, "Positive!" SPED #1-3 stated, "Our administration is great. They welcome them and help us out in any way they can." SPED #2-1 mentioned, "I believe the attitudes are quite positive. Students with disabilities are allowed to attend all assemblies, community outings, physical education, any activities in the gym, graduation, you name it." One dissenting teacher, GED #1-1 stated:

> I do not feel they (students with disabilities) are supported by the administration. Attitude towards being full members starts at the top. They are to blame for students not being included. I feel that seventy-five percent of the school was not included in the day-to-day opportunities school could provide and that the administration does not support full membership. The culture of the school often tells you that the only people who have full membership are athletes and those in leadership positions such as student council. That is a problem at this school. Many students are left out of the opportunity for full membership.

While many of the challenges and barriers mentioned did not include administration, several general education teachers did allude to issues regarding how administrators approached the allowance of students with disabilities to fully participate in the school environment. GED #1-2 mentioned that "the administration created separate events and opportunities as a way to include students with disabilities." Also mentioned by this teacher was that "due to a lack of staff to support students in the general population, we keep them isolated and we are content with that." SPED #2-1 said the "administration thinks that special education students should be kept self-contained in certain areas." Administrative inertia and mindset play an important part in attitudes toward acceptance. The message stated by GED #1-1 that, "this is how it has always been done and is the tradition of this school" was an underlying allusion in responses.

There was no clear cut answer to the third research question of what systemic barriers exist in the high school community to prevent students with disabilities from having full membership. A lack of parental involvement was one barrier. Teachers alluded to some administrative resistance, but the majority of resistance to full membership seemed to come from the teachers themselves and may be due more to the perceptions that focused on scripts of disability that were evident in most responses. SPED #1-5 stated it like this, "The administration feels fine about students with disabilities being involved. It must be determined by all who are involved. If parents push for it and teachers are against it, the principal would stand behind the teacher." If there is a system in place that puts the teacher's desires before that of the student, then this may be considered a barrier.

Again, the lack of exposure to students with disabilities may be the catalyst that is keeping full membership opportunities from being available to all stake holders in the educational system. The lack of exposure to students with disabilities during their formative years and the lack of exposure to specific strategies and interventions specially designed to assist these students, experienced by all the teachers participating in this study, may also be key in the implementation of full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. While historically, education has followed a dual model for general and special education students, teachers themselves may be perpetuating this model due to their perspectives and the use scripts of disability still evident in schools.

Summary of Chapter Four

Full membership is the premise that students with disabilities should be included in every aspect of the school community where they go to school. Black and Burello (2010) reported that full membership for students places them at the center of education. Acknowledging the unique, individual needs of students helps overcome the stigma of special education while reducing marginalization. Two major challenges to achieving full membership are scripts of disability and systemic barriers.

This study examined the experiences of fourteen general and special education teachers from two different high schools in the southeastern region of the United States. The study investigated general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities, scripts of disability that may be reflected in the educational practices of teachers, and systemic barriers that may exist, preventing students with disabilities from having full membership. There was no discernible difference between the responses of teachers when comparing the two high schools

during the data analysis phase. Overall, general education teachers were more open to full membership principles than special education teachers. Scripts of disability were evident in the responses of special education teachers. These teachers used the students' disabilities as reasons to deny full membership unless the students were considered capable both cognitively and behaviorally. Systemic barriers were alluded to with no specific area of impact. Systemic barriers appeared to be related more to the lack of exposure general and special education teachers had during formative years in their own education as well as during teacher preparation courses at the college and university level.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction of Chapter Five

In this final chapter, the findings of this study regarding full membership for students with disabilities are discussed. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and a restatement of the research questions that guided the researcher. Next, findings from this study provide information that contributes to the research base for successfully developing full membership opportunities for all students. Concluding remarks will summarize all key points from this study. These remarks are followed by recommendations that reflect useful applications of the findings and present possible areas of future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a clear understanding of the perspectives and lived experiences of general and special education teachers regarding full membership for students with disabilities. The intent was to add to the growing bank of knowledge related to barriers that deny students with disabilities the opportunity and right to full membership in the school in which they attend. Historically, specifically chosen curriculum was utilized as a method of inducting children into the dominant culture. Paliokosta and Blandford (2012) reported that this was done without consideration for meeting all learner needs. Steele (2012) stated that school personnel

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may not realize the multitude of ways students with disabilities are able to participate in the greater school and external community. Teachers get "caught up" in their personal attitudes or the labels given to students that were created by scripts of disability. The personal values of teachers may be reflected in their behaviors and attitudes towards these often marginalized students. Scripts of disability may be characterized by automatic assumptions that students with disabilities are unable to reach the same potential as their non-disabled peers. Systemic barriers may be in place which keeps these students from being granted full membership in the school community.

Participants were a representative sample of certified and highly qualified teachers. There were a total of 14 general and special education teachers that participated in the study. These teachers were from two different high schools located in the southern region of the United States. The high schools were located within the same district and represented a blending of different socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups.

Data provided this researcher with an opportunity to explore the voices of those teachers working daily with students with disabilities. Teachers' voices provided information related to continued scripts of disability that marginalize these students as well as systemic barriers that continue to exist in the educational system and which deny these students opportunities to gain the same educational benefit as their non-disabled peers.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are general and special education teachers' perspectives of full membership for students with disabilities?

2. What scripts of disability may be reflected in the general and special education teachers' practices?

3. What systemic barriers may exist in the high school community to prevent students with disabilities from having full membership?

The data were collected and inductively analyzed using a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The design allowed for identification of patterns with emerging themes that developed in the analysis of the teachers' interview data (Creswell, 1998).

Discussion of the Findings

Data from this study provided the opportunity to learn about the perspectives and lived experiences of 14 general and special education teachers regarding full membership for students with disabilities. The findings of this study offer new perspectives of thought and dialogue for those desiring to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The findings also have implications for teacher education programs, particularly in terms of special education program redesign and development.

Teacher Perspectives of Full Membership

The first research question asked: "What are the perspectives of general and special education teachers regarding full membership for students with disabilities?" Analysis of the data uncovered four specific themes. These themes, specifically related to teachers' perspectives of full membership, included: (a) a belief in the rights of full membership for students with disabilities; (b) lack of exposure to students with disabilities during the teachers formative years; (c) desire for parental involvement and communication; and (d) agreement among interviewees of general and special education

teacher roles when working with students having disabilities. Overall, each theme was interrelated to the others.

The Rights of Full Membership for Students with Disabilities. All teachers believed that students with disabilities had the right to be full members of the school community. Being able to provide those opportunities was not actually realized although there was positive support for students with disabilities being included in the school community. Many of the special education teachers did not feel their students were capable of being successful. Special education teachers may actually have held their students back from additional involvement in the school due to their perceptions and scripts of disability they were not aware they used with their students. These findings confirm what the literature says; however, worthy of note is that it was the special education teachers' perceptions that appeared to be the main deterrent to full membership for their students. This finding did not appear elsewhere in the reviewed literature pertaining to special education and full membership.

Smerdon (2002) mentioned that implementing full membership practices will take all members of the school community to enfold students with disabilities and consider them as "ours" while embracing their differences and providing support. Ware (2002) wrote that the idea of a disability naturally limiting an individual's ability to lead a "normal" life is "grounded in biological, social, and cognitive sciences" (p. 146). It could be that teachers, specially trained to work with students having disabilities consider them defective and unable to learn. Jorgensen et al. (2010) discussed how students labeled with a script of disability leads to skewed perceptions of ability. Scripts have led to teacher beliefs in student relationships and behavior that influence how they respond. Beliefs

shape practice and are lenses through which decisions are made (Davis & Andrzejewski, 2009).

Lack of Exposure to Students with Disabilities. Another theme that evolved during the analysis phase related to a lack of exposure to students with disabilities. Very few teachers had any involvement with these types of students during their pre-adult years. Those that did have some exposure said that physical disabilities were more prevalent than cognitive or behavioral. This was an unexpected finding. According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), 19% of the U.S. population in 2010 had some type of disability. Attitudes play a strong role in how people work with others having disabilities. In a 1991 nationwide survey of 1200 people without disabilities, conducted by Louis Harris for the National Organization on Disability, 75% felt pity for those with disabilities, 60% felt awkward, and 50% felt either guilt or fear. These types of attitudes are barriers to students successfully entering the greater community in their schools. Education and exposure to students with disabilities can increase teachers' abilities to better provide opportunities for full membership for this population of students.

There is currently limited research available to substantiate the need for early exposure of children to disabilities. Woodhouse (2008) wrote in a Yahoo Blog that exposure to special needs people "should be regarded as a vital part of a child's early social development to become comfortable with those who look and or act different in one or more ways" (¶ 1). The findings from one recent study, conducted by Megan MacMillan of the University of Exeter Medical School corroborated this statement. In that study, researcher MacMillan surveyed 1520 children in the age ranges of seven through sixteen. Questions revolved around contact with people having disabilities,

feelings of anxiety or empathy towards them, and types of interactions. Findings revealed that children who were exposed and had direct or indirect contact with others having disabilities tended to be less discriminatory and more empathetic. This resulted in the reduction of negative attitudes which could have long lasting effects (MacMillan, 2013). Negative attitudes often become internalized, resulting in scripts of disability and even the development of barriers to full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. If children, while young, are exposed to people with disabilities, they may develop more positive attitudes towards individuals with special needs that will be reflected in future practices when those children grow to adulthood. The general education teachers in this study had experienced more interactions with students having disabilities than the special education teachers through enrichment classes and having students with physical disabilities in their content classes. Since the special education teachers had less exposure, they may have unwittingly focused on the disability aspect of the students' abilities which became reflected in their practices toward full membership.

Parental Involvement and Communication. Parental involvement was a third theme that emerged during the analysis of data pertaining to research question one. This researcher did not expect the results that were identified during the analysis phase of the study. Questions about parental involvement were intended as a method for determining systemic barriers. Black and Burello (2010) encourage parental involvement and engagement for successful implementation of full membership practices for students. It was interesting that both general and special education teachers felt parental involved was important. However, while the teachers in this study felt it was important to have parents involved, they did little to gain that involvement. It was obvious, by the methods

employed to gain that involvement, that they did not have knowledge of the many possible ways to involve parents. Most attempts at parental contacts were negative in nature, mainly when behaviors were an issue, or to arrange for the required student's annual individualized educational plan meetings.

Bagin, Gallagher, and Moore (2008) support the partnership of parents and the school community to improve information exchanges and student outcomes. Partnerships improve full membership opportunities through the acquisition of knowledge about students' experiences and influences in school, at home, and in the community. Unknowingly, teachers may be resistant to parental involvement because they feel threatened. Teachers often feel that parents are not qualified to determine what is of educational value and importance to students.

Epstein and associates (2009) suggested that school, family, and community partnerships, through a team approach, can strengthen full membership opportunities while increasing parental involvement in a positive way. Epstein continued saying, "If educators view children as students, they are likely to see families as separate entities, leaving education to the school" (p. 9). She added, "If teachers view students as children, partnerships develop and they work together to improve programs and opportunities for students" (p. 9). Special education teachers in this study gave evidence of Epstein's second viewpoint when describing themselves and the role they play in their jobs. This was the fourth theme that emerged during data analysis.

General and Special Education Teacher Roles. In this study, most of the special education teachers defined themselves as only teachers, while the general education teachers defined themselves in broader terms such as facilitator, guide, or

motivator. The general education teachers' responses reflected a learner centered approach to education. Putting the child first in education places the focus on more differentiated practices, including opportunities to meet the diverse needs of the many different types of learners found in the classroom (Black & Burello, 2010). Special education teachers were more focused on being teachers, narrowing the scope of education to focus on accommodations and curriculum. General education teachers, through the use of facilitation tend to follow Black and Burello's (2010) idea of allowing students to "acquire and demonstrate their learning in different ways and then transfer learning to situations and circumstances outside the classroom" (p. 3). Teachers' perceptions of the specific role they play in the education of students with disabilities may be one of the main deterrents to full membership opportunities.

Scripts of Disability and Teacher Practices

The second research question was: "What scripts of disability may be reflected in the general and special education teachers' practices in the high school community?" When asked what teachers' expectations were for students with disabilities to be involved in full membership, it became obvious that scripts of disability were ingrained in some of the teachers' minds. This may be due to the lack of early exposure as previously mentioned, or a lack of education related to disabilities. Half of the general and special education teachers interviewed felt that students with disabilities should be taught with different expectations for learning than their non-disabled peers due to the students' disabilities and educational goals. The belief that students' disabilities limit what they can achieve was very distinct in responses. The other half felt that the learning expectations should be equal and that all students should master the material being taught. It was not

an unexpected finding that the general education teachers' responses fell within both realms. What came as an unexpected finding revolved around the special education teachers that felt students with disabilities should be given no special consideration in general education classrooms. Focusing on what students are not able to do rather than what they can accomplish is a major deterrent to implementing successful full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. The special education teachers' perceptions in this study appeared to be one of the main deterrents that limited full membership opportunities for students with disabilities due to learning expectations.

Scripts of disability identify students as having some type of deficiency or damage. These negative scripts have shaped professional practice and behaviors which have resulted in shaping teacher beliefs about how students are able to perform in educational settings. Sileo, Sileo, and Pierce (2008) discussed the many lenses through which teachers make decisions. Personal values impacting decisions and judgments may be biased and therefore limit special education teachers' beliefs that full membership will positively impact the students in their charge. Perhaps the in-depth training that special education teachers experience in preparation for working with students with disabilities is the deterrent. Special education teacher training focuses on methods for helping students overcome their disability while often teaching how to compensate for what they cannot do. This focus on what they cannot do rather than what they can may be the reason so many of the special education teachers in this study did not hold the necessary high educational expectations for their students that the general education teachers did. In the past, educator training programs that have followed two different traditional paths may have actually set the special education teacher up for failure. This normal pathway

through the teacher educational process is changing. In 2009, the Louisiana Board of
Regents, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Louisiana Department of
Education required all teacher preparation programs to develop an integrated general and
special education pathway to dual certification in general and special education. The goal
was to increase the number of highly qualified teachers entering the teaching profession
who have been trained with a focus on learning how to teach core subject curriculum as
well as meeting the special educational needs of those students with mild or moderate
disabilities (Louisiana Board of Regents, Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary
Education, & Louisiana Department of Education, 2009). It is a beginning to the change
we need to invoke if we, as a society, desire more for students who are struggling,
including those with an exceptionality. This is directly tied to Ware's (2002) belief that
the idea of a disability naturally limits an individual's ability to lead a normal life. Ware's
assertion that society's focus on inability rather than ability denies those with disabilities
the right to full membership and belonging is supported by the findings of this study.

Systemic Barriers to Full Membership

The third and final research question addressed systemic barriers—"What
systemic barriers may exist in the high school community preventing students with
disabilities from having full membership?" Systemic barriers are those policies,
procedures, or practices that keep students with disabilities from participating in all
aspects of the school community. Both sets of teachers understood the role school
systems should play and the importance of the administrative leader in this process. Yet,
the two traditionally different service models, general versus special education training
programs, that provide training to general and special education teachers may have

inadvertently created a systemic barrier of which the teachers who participated in this study were unaware.

Until 1954, schools were often segregated, denying not only African-Americans the right to a free appropriate public education with their peers, but also denying anyone who did not fit the norm of American society including students with disabilities. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* sparked the Civil Rights Movement (Banks, 2006), which eventually led to the enactment of Public Law 94-142, the *Education for All Handicapped Children's Act* (IDEIA, 2004). This act decreed the placement of students with disabilities should be in their neighborhood school with non-disabled peers. Past practices in the United States have denied students with disabilities the opportunity to enroll in and attend their neighborhood school. While students are no longer denied the right to attend their home school, there is continued resistance by teachers and administrators to including them in all aspects of the school community. Systemic barriers that were in place during teachers' early years as students may also be reflected in the practices at the schools where they were teaching. Separate events and opportunities were created as ways to involve students with disabilities which is a direct reflection of the separate teacher training programs in many states even today. Systemic barriers from the time these teachers were students themselves may also be reflected in their practices. The statement by GED #1-1 that, "that is how it has always been done and is the tradition of this school" reflected findings from the literature.

Only one barrier, parental involvement, was clearly apparent during the analysis of the data gathered during interviews. There may have been other systemic barriers. It

may be difficult to uncover these barriers through interviews alone. These types of

barriers are often difficult to uncover. Prolonged engagement in the field, that includes

observational data, may be required.

Close teacher and parental contact increases relationships that not only build

positive collaboration, but also serves to improve public opinions of education (Bagin,

Gallagher, & Moore, 2008). Working as a team will help ensure that students with

disabilities have the full membership opportunities necessary to become fully functioning

and contributing adults in their own communities and greater society. Epstein and

associates (2009) mentioned that "frequent interactions mean more students receive

messages about the importance of school, working hard, and staying in school" (p. 10).

"Student learning and development is a shared responsibility" (Epstein & Associates,

2009, p. 1). Welcoming parents into the education process is an inherent must for full

membership to be successful (Black & Burello, 2010). Parents are able to provide insight

into the life of students with disabilities outside of school. They can help to provide a

better understanding of how and why students may behave in certain ways under certain

circumstances. Parents bring a wealth of knowledge to the realm of education. Teachers

and administrators only need to listen and be willing to work with parents to increase the

involvement of this important resource. Unfortunately, teachers are often "afraid that

parents' participation may lead to interference in their instructional procedures" (Bagin,

Gallagher, & Moore, 2009, p. 126). What is oft forgotten is the multitude of other areas

that parents are able to contribute including monetary and personnel resources, talents

and skills to enrich the curriculum being taught, along with trouble-shooting and

problem-solving abilities. Black and Burello (2010) mentioned that "meaningful,

respectful, and even conflictual discussions can lead parents, teachers and school leaders to develop greater trust and motivation to do collective work" (p. 4).

While not identified as an overall systemic barrier, two special education teachers mentioned that a lack of resources and personnel hindered full membership for full inclusion. In Epstein and associates (2009) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, one of the six types of involvement for partnerships includes volunteering. Epstein defined this as the recruitment and organization of parental help and support. By recruiting parents as volunteers to serve in classrooms, these parents would not only bring their time and talents to the classroom and school community, they would also serve as invaluable resources and supports to children. Students would benefit from increased adult communication, targeted interventions, and additional learning time to name a few. Parents benefit as they gain an understanding of the teacher's job, improved self-confidence, and awareness that they are valuable and contributing members of the school community. Teachers benefit as they become more aware of what parents have to offer to the educational process and develop a greater rapport with the students they work with on a daily basis. It is important to note that an organized method for having parents and even other community members as volunteers includes training in order for their support and involvement to be most effective.

Conclusions

In conclusion, full membership is an important component of educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Even though the idea of equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities has been around since the 1970s, the acceptance of these students into the school community appears to be slow to progress. In

this study, both groups of teachers at both high schools agreed on the importance of full membership but there was no real consensus on how to provide the opportunity to further increase involvement for students with disabilities. It may be that the lack of personal experiences with individuals having disabilities during the teachers' formative years has contributed to these schools' slow progression. Minimal opportunities to work with children having disabilities while completing teacher education programs may also be a contributor to this slow change. The perceptions of the special education teachers in this study appeared to serve as deterrents to full membership opportunities for their students. The perception of inability due to the students' disabilities may have been the result of a lack of exposure to children with exceptionalities during the teachers' formative years or as a result of special education teacher training programs that focused on ways to overcome educational deficits rather than focusing on student strengths and abilities. Scripts of disability and systemic barriers deter positive outcomes for these students denying them the opportunity to grow socially and emotionally (Kleinert, Miracle, & Sheppard-Jones, 2007) and to become fully participating adults in a global society (Starratt, 2012).

Continued systemic barriers, including lack of partnerships between the school, family, and community may also play a role in the limited inclusion of students with disabilities in the school community. This also may have been caused by a lack of exposure to students with disabilities during the participants' pre-adult years. Since students with disabilities were not a part of the educational experiences of the majority of teachers in this study, there was minimal exposure or experience in working or playing with children that were different in cognitive or physical ability.

The legislature continues to mandate changes and increase requirements for special education services related to the needs of students with disabilities. School districts continue to follow these mandates but many provide little to no support or training to ensure the successful implementation of these changes and requirements. General and special education teachers must be willing to continue learning through professional development opportunities in order to improve their understanding of full membership and the importance of including students with disabilities. Collaboration may help to overcome barriers to full membership and value-laden actions in order to increase student achievement (Smith, 2010). Working together as teammates through professional learning communities may improve collaboration and support improvement methods for addressing the needs of students with disabilities in order to assist those students in gaining full membership in their schools while decreasing dropout rates. In professional learning communities, teachers work together interdependently, with children at the center of the decision-making process. Teachers in the learning community are open to new possibilities while working collectively to explore new ideas and best practices designed to address the needs of all stakeholders through collaboration and the use of data (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Mary, 2006). Leonard and Leonard (2003) advocated for professional learning communities as catalysts for change and school improvement. Working together collaboratively, general and special education teachers provide a systematic approach to increasing student involvement by sharing educational responsibilities and the ability to support student needs more appropriately. As reported in a study by Smith (2010), collaborative efforts create and support diverse instructional environments reducing the need for additional special education services.

Working collaboratively may help both general and special education teachers utilize new approaches toward learning and teaching practices (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Both general and special education teachers have talents that offer unique methods for involving students and improving full membership opportunities.

Another issue that emerged in this study, commented on by several teachers, related to students being served in the general education classroom. Forcing all students to be in an inclusion setting may actually place them in a more restrictive environment. Some students need more training in life skills, the ability to take care of themselves, than they do those skills designated as essential for college. Training in life skills includes lessons that revolve around activities such as banking, grocery shopping, using public transportation, and paying bills. College preparation classes frequently include higher level courses such as trigonometry, advanced biology, or English IV. Thinking inclusion is the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities, and that they are being denied a free appropriate public education because instruction is not taking place in the general education classroom, causes regression for some of these students. This way of thinking appears to be in direct opposition to the idea of full membership. As stated previously, Black and Burello (2010) reported that full membership places students at the center of education by acknowledging the unique, individual needs of each. Full membership includes participation in activities within and outside of the classroom (Morgan & Leonard, 2012) while being a valued member of the school community. If providing a special setting places the student at the center of his or her own educational need, then it should be said that full membership is not being denied. Rather, full membership is being developed as long as the ultimate goal is to prepare the child for

eventual involvement in the greater school community, albeit one step at a time, based on the student's needs.

The teachers in this study appeared to know what was needed to make full membership successful. The special education teachers' perceptions appeared to be the main deterrent to providing full membership opportunities for their students. During interviews, they provided additional ideas and ways to involve the students they work with. SPED #1-3 realized during the interview that there were several ways to involve students more directly in the school environment even though the students had moderate cognitive disabilities. This special education teacher said, "I never realized that I have been holding my students back from being more involved. I need to be a better advocate for including them. I plan to talk with my administrator to see how I can involve my students more than just going to physical education or art class." Learning more from those teachers who are successfully implementing full membership might increase those same opportunities for more students. Special educators being actively involved in the greater school community would provide role models for both general and special education students while providing the supports necessary to making the experience a success for the students with disabilities that may be already participating. While successful full membership practices rotate around strong administrators and their beliefs in the success of students with disabilities as reported by Black and Burello (2010), teachers themselves need more training in effective methods for working together, sharing responsibilities, understanding personal values and ethics regarding students with disabilities, and supporting children. A change in the mindset of general and special educators regarding their classrooms and how to implement full membership for students

with disabilities could effectively bring about a "new dawn" in the educational experiences for all students and stakeholders.

Recommendations

Successful implementation of full membership for all students requires a collaborative effort. In keeping with Black and Burello's (2010) full membership principles, students with disabilities need access to quality teachers who are morally literate and have the knowledge, dispositions, and skills to promote high expectations. It is well documented that full membership is positively influenced and supported by student learning environments, student interactions, accommodations, along with provided interventions and supports that will help address the needs of students with disabilities throughout the school community (Jorgensen et al., 2010). Findings from this study identified several areas of professional development that would benefit the educational practices of general and special education teachers. In addition, there were several areas that would benefit from additional research to better serve full membership implementation and opportunities for students with disabilities.

Developing methods for teacher chosen and focused professional development, supporting full membership practices, would improve implementation of full membership. Incorporating professional learning communities into the school community would help to improve special and general education teachers' relationships, their approach towards the collaboration process, and the improvement of full membership outcomes for all stakeholders. These professional learning communities should focus on teachers being able to work together for the greater good of the school by recognizing, embracing, and celebrating the differences of those they teach, while holding all students

accountable for learning. Levine and Marcus (2007) reported that meaningful dialogue is necessary using data-driven conversations to improve student outcomes. General and special education teachers working together, side-by-side through reflective practice improves educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Jorgenson et al., 2010).

Most teacher preparation programs have traditionally followed a split pathway towards certification. General education teacher programs have concentrated on teaching content while special education teacher preparation programs have concentrated on strategies and compensatory methods for learning. To better support full membership and increase educational opportunities for all students, teacher preparation programs should consist of a blend of general and special education components. Enabling teacher candidates the opportunity to receive certification in both general and special education teaching would enhance current educational practices.

Creating family and community partnerships would increase student involvement thereby improving academic outcomes for students and decreasing drop-out rates for schools. According to Epstein and associates (2009), schools that develop partnerships with families and other community organizations create more opportunities for students to be involved, recognized, and successful in their educational endeavors. Implementing her six types of partnership involvement would increase positive outcomes for students with disabilities and help these children to be better contributing members to the greater society in which they live.

Furthermore, training in ethics and the principles of full membership is imperative. Learning how personal values are reflections of teaching should be incorporated into not only teacher preparation programs, but professional development

activities as well. Incorporating effective models that focus on full membership, participation, and learning may provide the tools necessary to provide opportunities for "learning from difference to understand who we are as a community of individuals that are continuously in relationship with other human beings" (Black & Burello, 2010, p. 1).

One suggestion for further study is in collaborative practices. A better understanding of how effective practices may uncover values and assumptions that work against full membership while changing the scripts of disability to scripts of full membership is needed. Collaboration in special education began as a consultative model and was meant as a method of delivering service and support to general education teachers who were teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Friend & Cook, 1992). The need for collaborative practices continues to grow as our society takes on more and more global proportions and challenges. Friend and Cook (1992) define collaboration as the interaction of at least two parties engaged in shared decision making, working toward a common goal. In the area of special education, that common goal would be ensuring full membership opportunities for students with disabilities.

Another area suggested for further study is in the area of special education teachers' perceptions and the role those perceptions play in providing full membership opportunities for students with disabilities. Individuals must be careful not to allow personal bias or perceptions to develop into systemic barriers (Podell & Soodak, 1993). Are those perceptions keeping special education teachers from including their students in the greater school community? Do these perceptions guide special education teachers when considering reducing the need for special education services? Do perceptions,

possibly created by a lack of early exposure to children with disabilities, scripts of disability, and systemic barriers cloud the ability of special education teachers to see the bigger picture when considering life beyond the classroom and school community for students with disabilities?

One final area recommended for research would be related to the lack of exposure teachers had during their formative years. Does a lack of experience related to seeing, interacting, and working with children who are different from the norm play a part in perceptions? A lack of available research makes this an area ripe for needed pertinent information.

Creating schools where everyone is valued as equally important is needed to ensure that all are successful (Brower & Balch, 2005). To achieve that goal, the challenge for educators is to re-imagine conceptions of disability in order to "interrupt the narratives of normalcy" (Ware, 2002, p. 155). This challenge needs to be embraced collectively and collaboratively through ongoing, sustained, and meaningful professional development that has disabilities and abilities as central features of the school community. Then, and only then, may students with disabilities have equal access to full membership in schools.

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APPENDIX A

University Internal Review Board Approval

LOUISIANA TECH
U N I V E R S I T Y

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Pamela Morgan and Dr. Pauline Leonard

FROM: Barbara Talbot, University Research

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: June 24, 2013

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

**"General and Special Education Teachers Perspectives on
Full Membership for Students with Disabilities"**

HUC 1101

The proposed study's revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.

Projects should be renewed annually. *This approval was finalized on June 24, 2013 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project, including data analysis, continues beyond June 24, 2014.* Any discrepancies in procedure or changes that have been made including approved changes should be noted in the review application. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of University Research.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Research or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Mary Livingston at 257-2292 or 257-5066.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Superintendent

(Date)

███████
███████
███████

Dear ███████,

I am currently the ███████████████████████ in the ████████████████ I am working on my doctoral dissertation at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, Louisiana, under the supervision of Dr. Pauline Leonard. The title of my study is General and Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on Full Membership for Students with Disabilities. The purpose of my study is to gain the perspectives of general and special education teachers as it relates to the acceptance and inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of the school community. These perspectives will then provide this researcher with an opportunity to reflect and analyze gathered data to determine relevant professional development activities that would improve student opportunities for school-wide participation and educational outcomes.

I am requesting your permission to conduct the proposed study with two schools in the ███████████████ and to interview ten teachers at each site. I will include five general and five special education teachers per site regarding their perspectives of working with and including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, school wide activities, and school-based organizations. This work is solely for the completion of my dissertation process. I will comply with the Family Education Right and Privacy Act (FERPA) and protect the rights of privacy to any obtained information during this process. All information gathered will be held in strict confidence.

I am enclosing the letter of Informed Consent, which I will provide to all potential interview participants. This document contains specific details of my study and may serve to address additional questions that you may have. If you have further questions, I may be contacted at ███████████████████. My home telephone number is ███████ and my cell number is ███████, which is my preferred method of contact.

It is my intention to begin this process in August, 2013 and complete it by the end of September, 2013. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Pamela S. Morgan

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Letter

General and Special Education Teachers Perspectives
on Full Membership for Students with Disabilities

My name is Pamela Morgan and I am a student at Louisiana Tech University. I am also an employee of ███████████████████. I am doing a research study called General and Special Education Teachers Perspectives on Full Membership for Students with Disabilities. This research is being supervised by Dr. Pauline Leonard. I would like to invite you to participate in this research study. The main purpose of this form is to provide information about the research so that you can make a decision about whether you want to participate. If you choose to participate, please sign in the space at the end of this form.

**Please read this consent document carefully
before you decide to participate in thisstudy.**

The purpose of this research study is to gain the perspectives of general and special education teachers as it relates to the acceptance and full membership of students with disabilities in all aspects of the school community. These perspectives will then provide this researcher with an opportunity to reflect and analyze the gathered data to determine relevant professional development activities that would improve student opportunities for school-wide participation and educational outcomes.

You are being invited to participate because you teach in an educational setting and work with student with disabilities.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer several interview questions related to your perspectives of working with students with disabilities as well as past and present experiences you have had. Your participation will take about 60 minutes for the interview process or two 30-minute sessions with a possible second interview of no more than 30 minutes. You will be audio taped during your participation in this research. I will be the only individual to listen to these recordings, which will be kept for 5 years following the completion of the research project. If at any time you wish to listen to or obtain a copy of the recording(s). You may request a copy in writing.

The total amount of time for each participant would be no more than one and one-half hours.

Risks and Benefits:
Although no study is completely without risk, I don't anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed by participating in this research. If at any time, you find yourself becoming uncomfortable, you may stop your participation.

I don't expect any direct benefits to your from participation in this study. As mentioned above, this study is designed to gain insight into methods for improving educational outcomes and increase school-community participation for students with disabilities.

Compensation:
There are no costs to participate in this study. All costs will be borne by the researcher.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be a drawing for as $25.00 gift card to a local restaurant at the completion of the study.

Confidentiality
The results of the research study will be published, but your name or identity will not be revealed. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, the researcher will store all recorded information on a flash drive, which will be locked in her personal files for five years before being destroyed. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept locked in my research supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name or personal information will not be used in any report.

As a mandated reporter, if I believe you are planning to harm a vulnerable child or adult, or if you are planning to harm yourself, I am required by law to file a report. If this happens, I will tell my research supervisor your name and my concern. You will be contacted if this happens.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or if you choose to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time. There will be no consequences.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:
Pamela Morgan, Graduate Student, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA.
psm009@latech.edu
Pauline Leonard, PhD, College of Education, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA. pleonard@latech.edu or (318) 257-4609

Voluntary Consent
By signing this form, you are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you. You are also saying that you understand the risks and benefits of this research study and that you know what you are being asked to do. The researcher will be happy to answer any questions you have about the research. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (318) 402-2494 or psm009@latech.edu. You may also contact my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Pauline Leonard at (318) 257-4609 or pleonard@latech.edu.

Note: By signing below, you are telling the researcher "yes," you are willing to participate in this study. You may choose to withdraw this consent at any time. Please keep one copy of this form for your records.

Date: _____

Your Printed Name:_____

Your Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

Project: Time of Interview:

Date: Place:

Interviewer: Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

1. What is your role as an educator in the school?

2. Think back to your own high school days-how were students with disabilities taught in your school? (inclusion? resource? self-contained? Segregated in another area of the school?)

3. Now think about your college/university teacher preparation classes. What methods did you learn for working with diverse learners?

4. If I entered your classroom, what would I see? (physical arrangements, climate, culture)

5. Thinking about the term "full membership," explain what this means in relation to participation in the school community.

6. What role does the school play in the development of student perceptions of full membership?

7. How do you see students with disabilities in terms of being members of your classes?

8. What do you see as your role in helping students with disabilities participate in classroom activities?

9. What do you consider to be the role of a general education teacher in an inclusion classroom? a special education teacher? a paraprofessional?

10. What impact do you feel you have on educating students with disabilities?

11. What are your expectations of students with disabilities compared to non-disabled peers in your classrooms?

12. What methods do you use to engage all learners in your classroom activities and discussions?

13. How does a student's home environment influence or impact his / her educational success?

14. How often do you communicate or conference with the parents of students with disabilities that you teach or support? Are they mostly positive or negative?

15. How do you feel about students with disabilities participating in school-wide activities? (sports, clubs, organizations, rites of passage)

16. What do you feel are the attitudes of your administration towards students with disabilities and full membership?

17. What challenges do you perceive to be as inhibiting to full membership for students with disabilities in the school culture and school community?

18. What involvement should students with disabilities have within the school?

19. What considerations should be given when encouraging students with disabilities to participate more fully in the educational experience?

20. What do you perceive as limitation for students with disabilities to fully participate in the educational experience?

21. What would or could make it difficult to include students in full membership?

22. What inhibitions might you have in regard to including students with disabilities in extracurricular activities at the school?

23. What types of barriers or obstacles do you feel are currently in place that denies students with disabilities full membership in the school community?

24. What could or should be done to alleviate these barriers?