CASE STUDY OF THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH INCLUSIVE

LEADERS LEARN ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE,

SKILLS, AND DISPOSITIONS TO LEAD

INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

by

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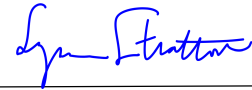**March 16, 2023**
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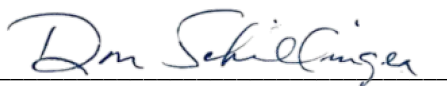
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ABSTRACT

This case study was implemented to better understand how leaders of inclusive schools develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to improve schooling for all students. Inclusive leaders find that leadership preparation programs provide theoretical knowledge that is only minimally useful to them when they are faced with the day-to-day complexities of leading inclusive schools. The most important learning takes place through "trial by fire" on the job. They learn through experiencing critical incidents which occur over both the short and long term. These critical incidents have been categorized through this study as acute and chronic critical incident. Additionally, significant learning occurs through mentorship with seasoned leaders who have themselves learned to successfully lead inclusive schools.

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Date _4/13/23_

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assignments. As they slept, I spent countless hours awake, working, and praying to be

able to give them the time with their mother that they deserve.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leading inclusive schools with diverse students who have individual special needs is a complex and challenging problem school leaders face. School leaders are critical in creating and sustaining effective inclusive schools (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Successful inclusive school leaders actively work to develop and maintain a culture in which all stakeholders value all students, believe that all students can be successful and belong in the school community (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Successful inclusive school leaders create a community of caring, where all students and staff feel a sense of belonging and community within classrooms (Theoharis & Causton, 2014).

Many school leaders lack the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to successfully lead schools to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities (Bozkus, 2013). Frost and Kersten (2011) found that while principals believed their knowledge about special education was average to good, principals still felt they needed more support to meet the needs of inclusive students. Bozkus (2013) found that within all but five states, educational leadership programs only offer classes that teach the legal aspects of special education rather than how to successfully lead and support their schools to teach students with disabilities. McHatton et al. (2010) found that preparation and leadership programs focused primarily on legal issues, including funding and

accommodations and modifications, while less time was devoted to diverse learner characteristics. The time allotted to learning how to lead inclusive schools was minimal.

School districts provide professional development that primarily consists of mentoring or professional development workshops that build on the foundations developed through leadership preparation programs (McHatton et al., 2010). School districts provide essential support to guide principals to build strong, inclusive leadership; however, it is apparent through principal feedback that it is not sufficient (McHatton et al., 2010).

Both leadership programs and professional development are necessary for leaders to develop foundational knowledge. Still, they do not fully prepare leaders with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for the complex problems of leading inclusive schools (McHatton et al., 2010). School leaders, throughout their careers, refine their leadership skills as they encounter and respond to context-embedded critical incidents (Sider et al., 2017). Critical incidents in educational leadership contexts are not always traumatic or crisis-related, but they always disrupt or interrupt what is currently going on (Mander, 2008).

Leadership knowledge and skills are necessary, but not sufficient, in guiding inclusive leaders. School leaders' dispositions also play a significant role in their leadership: when critical incidents occur, knowledge, skills, and dispositions work in concert as leaders respond to, interpret, and manage incidents (Yamamoto et al., 2014). Critical incidents, whether experienced directly or indirectly, have been found to have an impact on their perspectives of and how school leaders lead inclusive schools effectively (Sider et al., 2017).

Background

Inclusivity, equity, and social justice became part of the fabric of America's social conscience as far back as 1883 when Emma Lazarus's familiar sonnet, The New Colossus, was engraved at the foot of the Statue of Liberty: Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Since that monumental historical moment, the quest for inclusivity in American society and American schools has not stopped. But schools have struggled to provide equitable opportunities for all children (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021).

Throughout the 19th century and most of the 20th century, children with disabilities were placed in special facilities and into special schools because public schools did not allow students with disabilities (Boroson, 2017). Finally, in 1975, the 94th United States Congress put the first legislative act into effect which stated that students with disabilities would get a free, appropriate public education: this new idea created complex challenges for schools (Boroson, 2017). While much positive change has occurred since 1975, much more needs to be learned about effectively leading inclusive schools (Boroson, 2017).

Individual school leaders have considerable autonomy over implementing inclusive practices within their schools (Ryan, 2007). Many schools and districts still struggle to provide equitable, inclusive education for all students. Because of increasing political and community pressures to improve student achievement for all subgroups of students, school leaders today may have an even greater responsibility and challenge than leaders in the past (Ryan, 2007). Effective inclusive practices can only occur within a

school culture where stakeholders value all students, including students with disabilities, and have a powerful, flexible set of pedagogical and curricular tools (Ryan, 2007).

In order to effectively lead inclusive schools, school leaders believe they should focus on (1) creating a vision, (2) collaboratively creating implementation plans, (3) creating a logistically sound way to provide inclusive services, (4) creating solid collaborative teams, (5) creating ongoing professional development opportunities, (6) monitoring and continuously improving service delivery as needed, (7) and intentionally creating a positive school culture that promotes the idea that all students can be successful and belong in the school community (Theoharis & Causton, 2014).

The Louisiana Department of Education's 2018-19 Special Education Data Profile shows that in Louisiana, during the three school-year spans from the 2016-2017 to the 2018-2019 school year, students with disabilities proficiency scores on the state standardized test in ELA were 39%, 35%, and 39%, respectively, and 36%, 33%, and 35% in math, respectively (Louisiana Department of Education, 2022). Persistent underperformance suggests there are continuing challenges in how special education students are educated, particularly how inclusive education is implemented across the state. Even though efforts to improve inclusive education began nearly fifty years ago, schools still struggle to implement an effective inclusive education model (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify what specific knowledge, skills and dispositions are essential for leaders of inclusive settings and to determine how inclusive leaders develop essential leadership skills.

- What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do leaders develop to effectively lead in inclusive settings?

- How do school leaders learn inclusive leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions?

Theoretical Lens

Sensemaking is about understanding, organizing, and making sense of how an out-of-the-ordinary, disruptive event prompts action and evaluation (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking has three basic steps, (1) an event occurs, (2) one interprets that event, and (3) what happens as a result (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Similarly, critical incidents are events that cause some sort of disruption that prompts action and change to occur (Mander, 2008; Sider et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2014). When a critical incident occurs, three things should be available: (1) a thorough description of the event, (2) antecedent behaviors or events, and (3) a thorough description of the consequences (Weiss et al., 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2014).

When one is going through the sensemaking process the end goal is to find meaning and learn from the event to come out stronger on the other end, rather than finding truth or restoring to what normal was (Weick et al., 2005). How one receives information from sense-giving will significantly affect the actions one takes in that restoration process. This leads to the understanding that emotions will also affect those actions because critical incidents are often surrounding events that trigger strong emotional experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because of the seeming intractability of the problem of underperformance of students with disabilities. Today's school leaders are increasingly held accountable for the academic achievement of all students. Accountability measures put in place by outside agencies such as state and federal education departments have increased pressures on leaders to engage more fully in building strong inclusive practices and school cultures that promote social justice and value all students. In the southern state, in which this study will be conducted, part of the accountability system, the School Performance Index, is based on test scores and considers subgroups of the population, including students with disabilities. To calculate the growth index, there are two questions: (1) If students are not yet achieving Mastery, are they on track to doing so? (2) Are students growing at a rate comparable to their peers? Question one is related to getting students to score Mastery of each portion of the standardized test by eighth grade. Question two looks at subgroups across the state and analyzes whether students out or underperformed students of the same demographic and economic standing. This means that if a student did not meet their Growth to Mastery score but outperformed their peers, they will still earn points for the school toward their School Performance Score. Schools can be labeled as 'Urgent Intervention Required' or 'Critical Intervention Required' if the subgroup performance is equivalent to a 'D' or 'F' or if their out-of-school suspension rates are more than double the national average for a certain number of years. Potential negative sanctions for schools and leaders who fail to demonstrate appropriate academic growth of subgroups are severe (Louisiana Department of Education, 2022). But even more consequential is adverse effects to students, families, and communities when

schools fall short of equity and social justice for all students and families (Kowalchuk, 2019).

School leaders, at all levels, who support and encourage inclusive practices within schools, also support, demonstrate, and lead through a social justice lens (Kowalchuk, 2019). By focusing on improving social justice practices within schools and communities, leaders celebrate and encourage diversity. Through their efforts, marginalized groups will have the opportunity to be heard, where traditionally they have not been, which leads to being empowered to be successful in all aspects of their lives.

Methodology

The qualitative design was an instrumental case study, with multiple embedded cases. The case was inclusive school leadership. I studied the critical incidents that shape school leaders' leadership in inclusive schools. I did not focus specifically on the leaders or the schools themselves, but rather on the critical incidents which shaped their perspectives. Case study research has an interesting characteristic, which is that they are particularistic, which means that the researcher can focus on specific concepts directly related to their inquiry (Merriam, 2014). Instrumental research is used when the researcher is focused on a specific issue, rather than a specific person or school (Merriam, 2014; Stake, 1995).

Primary methods of data collection were a researcher-created survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The survey asked participants to rate the degree to which four sources of learning (leadership preparation program, in-service professional development through a school district, mentorship relationship, and critical on-the-job incidents) has informed their leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions

associated with inclusive leadership practices. The survey results informed the focus of semi-structured interviews and provided an overview of leaders' learning. Additionally, survey results were used to triangulate findings from the other sources of data and for cite and participant selection. Leaders were selected to participate in the study because they demonstrated through the survey that they engaged in significant learning through critical incidents. Published reports of critical incidents, school board policies, and other publicly available records, such as school board minutes and School Improvement Plans were analyzed.

Limitations of the Study

Because this is primarily a qualitative case study the outcomes were primarily descriptive. While strategies which include, member checking, expert auditing, researcher self-reflection, and triangulation across research sites and participants were used to establish trustworthiness, no quantifiable claims of validity or reliability can be made. It is incumbent upon readers to formulate naturalistic generalizations as they make connections between their own lived experiences and the rich, thick description provided in Chapter 4 of this study.

Definition of Significant Terms

Inclusive schools: Students with disabilities are educated within the regular classroom setting while receiving the appropriate accommodations or modifications that they need to be successful in a school where all stakeholders believe that every student is valued, respected, and able to succeed with the appropriate support (Coulston & Smith, 2013; Kowalchuk, 2019; Sider et al., 2017; Theoharis & Causton, 2014).

Inclusive leadership: School leaders lead with the lens that all students can be successful with the appropriate support in place while encouraging value and respect, and celebrating the diversity of their students, staff, and community (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Kowalchuk, 2019; Shogren et al., 2015).

Critical incident: An event that is out of the ordinary and causes a disruption or interruption from the perspective of the person who is experiencing it and causes that person to look at the event critically to make decisions and changes to their practices to move forward through an improved lens (Mander, 2008; Sider et al., 2017; Yamamoto et al., 2014).

Researcher Positionality (Biases and Assumptions)

It is important for me to share my biases and assumptions as the researcher in this study. In the district in which I will be conducting my research, I am a school leader at one of the elementary schools. I am also a former special education teacher and a strong advocate in my school and parish for inclusive education.

- I believe that in inclusive environments there are still frequently individuals and groups of students whose needs are not sufficiently met.
- I believe that there are teachers who don't put in as much effort to reach certain individuals because of their beliefs about what students are able to learn well.
- I believe that regular education students are not taught about educational equality and do not value their disabled peers.
- I believe that school districts do not put in as much effort to support teachers in inclusive classrooms.

- I believe that parents or guardians of students with disabilities are not valued as much in schools and school districts.

- I believe that school board members are unaware of the inclusive practices being used in the schools in their district.

Summary

School leaders are being held accountable for the performance of all students in their schools; however, public school performance data shows that schools are continuing to not adequately serve their diverse needs population. Inclusive leadership is not a new idea, and there is research that points leaders in the direction of how to be effective school leaders, however, there is no indication of where those researchers learned those knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Leadership preparation programs and district professional development is not supporting school leaders to be able to effectively lead inclusive schools. The current study can provide insight into how school leaders gain their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective inclusive leaders. The current study's findings will encourage school leaders to reflect on their current practices and district leaders and leadership preparation programs to adjust what and how they teach school leaders about inclusive leadership.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify what specific knowledge, skills and dispositions are essential for leaders of inclusive settings and to determine how inclusive leaders develop essential leadership skills.

- What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do leaders develop to effectively lead in inclusive settings?

- How do School Leaders Learn Inclusive Leadership knowledge, Skills and Dispositions?

The problem and purpose of my study fit within the nexus of the problem areas addressed through the literature. For this literature review, the problem areas or topics will be called research pathways. The three research pathways are (1) critical incidents and leadership development, (2) inclusive leadership, and (3) the role of the school leader in establishing a positive school culture.

The first pathway is critical incidents and leadership development. Mander (2008) found that most of the literature surrounding critical incidents is related to emergency services, military, or politics, and there are few studies of critical incidents as they relate to school leaders. Critical incidents have been found to have an impact on how school leaders lead inclusive schools (Sider et al., 2017) . Weiss et al. (2020) detail that three things should be available when working through a critical incident: (1) a thorough

description of the event, (2) antecedent behaviors or events, and (3) a thorough description of the consequences.

The second pathway is Inclusive leadership. School leaders are the key to creating an inclusive school through their support of all stakeholders (Sider et al., 2017). The work of effective inclusive school leaders has been ongoing for nearly fifty years and still many schools still struggle with this because of both the complexity of the problem and the efficacy of education leaders receive before entering the classroom (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Sider et al., 2017).

The third pathway is the role of the school leader in establishing a positive school culture. Positive school culture is the most important aspect of having a successful school (Smith et al., 2020). School leaders who focus on collegiality among their staff tend to have a school culture that promotes a positive culture of learning for all (Sezgin et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Another important aspect of creating a positive school culture is listening to and encouraging input and feedback from all stakeholders (Smith et al., 2020).

I completed a comprehensive literature search of the literature surrounding my topic. The databases I used in my comprehensive literature search included EBSCO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The data parameters I used to limit my search were empirical research studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 2000 to the present. I reviewed and evaluated all pertinent studies which I found through my search. Through my analyses and evaluation of the research, I identified the studies which were most salient to my research, and which were most frequently cited by other authors. In this chapter, the contexts, methodology, and outcomes of these seminal articles are presented

to form a foundational understanding of the current research. The generalizations made from these seminal studies are supported by citing other studies from within each pathway. The primary search terms I used included school leaders, inclusive practices, inclusive schools, inclusive leadership, critical incidents, school culture, school climate, positive culture, positive climate, leadership development, developing leaders, perspectives, and leadership roles.

Following this introduction, I detail the theoretical framework that I will use to inform my study and give the rationale for choosing it. Then, I introduce the three pathways that are within the nexus of the purpose of my study and detail significant studies that support each pathway as they relate to my study. Finally, I conclude by introducing generalizations, larger themes, and critiques within my review of the literature, and summarize the chapter.

Theoretical Framework

Sensemaking is about understanding, organizing, and making sense of how people and organizations respond to an event that has occurred which is out of the ordinary to an individual or an organization and causes some sort of disruption which prompts action and evaluation (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). What makes an event a critical incident for individuals or organizations is how they interpret that event and then make sense of what to do next (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking is a process. First, an out-of-the-ordinary event occurs, then individuals or organizations begin noticing and categorizing details of the event, along with the classification of what could happen next, or presumptions about the event. Next, the interpretation of the event is influenced by others involved in that

individual's or organization's day-to-day routines, as well as the systemic aspects related to them and their field. Finally, action is taken, and through communicating with one another in an organization, some sense can be made to inform an appropriate response.

When one is going through the sensemaking process the end goal is to find meaning and learn from the event to come out stronger on the other end, rather than finding truth or restoring to what normal was (Weick et al., 2005). How one receives information from sense-giving will significantly affect the actions one takes in that restoration process. This leads to the understanding that emotions will also affect those actions because critical incidents are often surrounding events that trigger strong emotional experiences.

Sensemaking has three basic steps, (1) an event occurs, (2) one interprets that event, and (3) what happens as a result of the event The process of sensemaking begins when an event happens. The beginning event can be seen as chaos, surprise, disruption, or an interruption to an organization's work (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2014) and Maitlis (2005) both describe the beginning event as when one initially realizes that something out-of-the-ordinary, or a critical incident, has occurred. Sensemaking will then continue until that critical incident has been restored to normal enough, or perhaps to a new normal because of permanent interruption (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014).

The process of sensemaking continues in developing an interpretation of what has occurred (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Reinhorn et al. (2017) and Louis et al. (2013) both describe this interpretation individually, as to how one observes and interprets the critical incident

based on their experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs, and organizationally, as the organization's context as well as multiple people's perspectives which affects interpretation. When sensemaking is occurring, reflecting on what has happened previously with others who have experienced similar critical incidents is necessary to contextualize the incident and facilitate positive growth for individuals and the institution (Weick et al., 2005). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2014) discuss that putting somewhat of a barrier around the situation to control the information related to the critical incident and focusing on those major points will also support the understanding of what is currently going on.

The process of sensemaking begins to close when what happens as the results or consequences of the event begins. At this point in the process, those going through the sensemaking process can begin to answer questions about what actions, responses, or determinations should happen next to revive yourself either individually or organizationally (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2014) describes this as the enactment process which leads to outcomes that were brought forth by sensemaking.

Sensemaking cannot occur when the second part, interpretation of the event, is not fully understood or becomes constrained or ambiguous (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). Those that are in the sensemaking process should understand that it is not necessarily going to result in truth or getting something right, it is, rather, about moving upward and onward to continue with the work being done (Weick et al., 2005). Through every step of the process, learning opportunities emerge and enable individuals and organizations to make a significant change (Louis et al., 2013).

Sandberg and Tsoukas (2014) explain when it is most necessary to use sensemaking. First, sensemaking must occur with an event that has already taken place, and it is a social construct. That is, when sensemaking is being used, it is used to keep the identity of the individual or organization alive, although it could cause changes. As stated previously, to do this one should put somewhat of a barrier around the situation to control the information related to the critical incident, and focusing on those major points will also support the understanding of what is currently going on.

For the sensemaking process to occur, several steps are essential. First, an event must occur which interrupts daily activities, these can also be referred to as critical incidents as the event will prompt interpretive actions to begin unexpectedly, which could be something planned or unplanned. Then, this interruption causes individuals or organizations to interpret what has gone on to develop a narrative that leads into the process of action, or enactment, upon the critical incident. A final note to point out is that sensemaking is controlled by the factors already in place in the organization including things such as context, emotions, politics, technology, etc. and for the most effective sensemaking process, these factors are used intentionally, rather than by happenstance (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014).

Sensemaking theory has been used to understand the change in a variety of institutional contexts. Three studies are presented herein that used sensemaking theory to better understand either an individual's or an organization's responses to critical incidents, and how they moved forward with the organization's goals through the learning that occurred (Louis et al., 2013; Maitlis, 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017). The contexts of the three studies all vary; in the first study, (Louis et al., 2013) used the

sensemaking theory in one public school, in the second study, (Maitlis, 2005) used the sensemaking theory with several British symphony orchestras, while in the third study, (Reinhorn et al., 2017) used the sensemaking theory in the context of several school districts.

Louis et al. (2013) used sensemaking theory to explore the experiences of school leaders and teachers in implementing a distributed leadership framework within their schools. Sensemaking was used in this study because of the change aspect associated with it. With this, sensemaking provides individuals and organizations with the opportunity to collectively understand the incident, or change, that occurred. Collective sensemaking was used in this study because distributed leadership is a collective effort between school leaders and teachers, and through sensemaking, learning opportunities arise.

Maitlis (2005) used sensemaking theory in a multiple case study design to understand the change in the organizational context of symphony orchestras. There were several reasons for using sensemaking theory for this study. First, symphony orchestras, being part of cultural life, live in a place where opinions about the product are ever-changing. Second, with many other leisure activities coming about through generational changes, orchestras are a more traditional leisure activity in which change should happen to preserve the art, especially in areas where there is political turmoil. Third, orchestras have opposing interests to wade through, in that they need not only musicians but also conductors, board members, customers, etc., all of whom have other interests in their lives. Sensemaking was used in this study to (1) produce a narrative for each

organization, (2) pinpoint how each organization navigated the social interactions, and (3) recognize the results from those interactions.

Reinhorn et al. (2017) used sensemaking theory to understand the implementation of a new accountability model which would be seen as more rigorous and equitable than the previously used model. They sought to understand how an individual's experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs would affect the implementation of the model as well as how the accountability was implemented at the school level. Sensemaking theory was used during their research because they were interested in the school leader's previous knowledge and beliefs around evaluation, their capacity and commitment to providing effective feedback through evaluation, and how the organization supported them through the implementation of the evaluation process. Sensemaking theory allows policymakers to understand implementation and pushback when implementing new policies such as accountability more fully. Both principals and teachers are influenced individually, organizationally, and by the policy when it comes to implementing or not implementing policies. When the individual cognition differed between the participants, they used sensemaking theory to develop the why behind those differences.

Sensemaking theory is a useful framework to inform my study. Critical incidents are events that cause some sort of disruption that prompts action and change to occur, while the sensemaking process includes a disruptive event or critical incident to occur, then interpretation and action (Mander, 2008; Sider et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2014). In my context, I will study critical incidents that happened previously, how that event was interpreted by the school leader, what action was taken after, and finally how that event changed how they lead inclusive schools. Through my

review of the literature, I found several studies that used sensemaking in a similar

context. Reinhorn et al. (2017) used sensemaking theory within a school setting to

determine the perspective of school leaders based on a critical incident, which was a

change in the teacher accountability process. Louis et al. (2013) used sensemaking theory

within a school setting to determine the interpretation and implementation of a critical

incident or change that occurred through implementing distributed leadership.

Critical Incidents and Leadership Development

Studies reviewed within this research pathway were conducted in a variety of

educational contexts using a variety of methodological approaches: Studies were

conducted in both North American and German public schools Participants included

school leaders, teachers, teacher leaders, school board officials, parents, and students.

Mander (2008) collected data using life history, semi-structured interviews, research

journals/diaries, and personality assessments. Sider et al. (2017) and Yamamoto et al.

(2014) used interviews to collect data, while Weiss et al. (2020) used Flanagan's critical

incident technique during group discussions to collect data. Findings of each of the

studies included types of critical incidents participants have experienced, how one

effectively navigates critical incidents to come out stronger on the other end, and how

they changed after a critical incident occurred (Mander, 2008; Sider et al., 2017; Weiss et

al., 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2014).

Sider et al. (2017) examined the special education training school leaders

experience, day-to-day issues, and critical incidents school leaders experience related to

students with disabilities. The research questions were: (1) What formal training do

principals experience in supporting students with special education needs in inclusive

schools? (2) What are some of the critical, and day-to-day, leadership experiences of school principals in supporting students with special education needs in inclusive schools? (3) What do other key stakeholders in schools (e.g., students, parents, teachers, school board officials) perceive as important leadership issues regarding supporting students with special education needs in inclusive schools? This study included fifteen principals, two school board officials, one parent, one student, and one teacher across four school districts in Canada. The methodology for this study was interviews.

Findings demonstrate that school leaders use their personal values or morals when leading through critical incidents and that they have had previous experiences and training to support them in effectively leading through critical incidents. Most of the school leaders indicated that the critical incidents they have experienced are related to students who have had problem behaviors (Sider et al., 2017).

Mander (2008) studied critical incidents to answer the following research questions: (1) What factors/experiences give an individual the capacity and capability to deal effectively with Critical Incidents and Critical Episodes? (2) What specific strategies/support mechanisms do colleagues/organizations use to deal effectively with Critical Incidents and Critical Episodes? (3) What leadership styles and preferences enable individuals and organizations to deal with Critical Incidents effectively? Critical incidents related to the field of education are on a smaller scale than those related to crisis events, however, can cause high stress and anxiety for those involved, and those involved are the ones who decide if it was a critical incident for them. The sample of this study included three elementary schools, two of which had two participants and one had one participant, one junior high school with three participants, and one infant school with two

participants. The participants included four head-teachers, four deputy head-teachers, and four class teachers. The methodology of this study included life history, semi-structured interviews, research journals/diaries, and personality assessments.

Findings demonstrate that the things that give an individual the capacity and capability to deal effectively with critical incidents include having a well-rounded mentor, having positive experiences as a child in school, having a positive and stable family, having the ability to be self-aware, having positive experiences that build up their self-efficacy, and having previous experience dealing with critical incidents. To be able to deal with critical incidents effectively, school leaders should be well balanced and well adjusted, temperate, conscientious, hard-working and enthusiastic, compassionate, tolerant and empathetic, can see the big picture as the details simultaneously, and being self-aware and self-regulating were all important to have (Mander, 2008).

Weiss et al. (2020) evaluated critical incidents occurring with students who have emotional and behavioral challenges. The research questions were (1) What critical incidents involving students' behaviors do teachers describe in secondary education? Can these events be assigned to categories? (2) What causes and antecedent conditions for these events are outlined? (3) What are the consequences of these events and who or which areas do these consequences affect? This study was conducted in Germany with 77 secondary general education teachers, 56 females, and 21 males, who have inclusive classrooms. Flanagan's critical incident technique during group discussions with 77 teachers to discuss the antecedent and consequences of critical incidents was used.

Findings demonstrate that classroom disruptions, aggressive behavior, behaviors perceived as unusual, and taking unfair advantage of special conditions were critical incidents that teachers have experienced (Weiss et al., 2020).

Yamamoto et al. (2014) sought to understand how school leaders view critical incidents they have experienced and how they affected their leadership. Nine school leaders participated in this study, five females and four males between the ages of 39-64 years old. This research was conducted by using multi-case case studies and inquiry-style interviews.

They found that after experiencing a critical incident, their views of themselves and the world around them were redefined, they felt as though they lost a piece of themselves related to leading schools that they had to redefine to grow as a leader, and relationships with others involved and with themselves were strengthened because of the critical incident (Yamamoto et al., 2014).

Mander (2008) found that very little research has been conducted regarding critical incidents related to the field of education; most is related to emergency services, military, or politics. The type of critical incidents that relate to education will generally not be traumatic or crisis-related, but rather as incidents that disrupt or interrupt what is currently going on and notes that for events to be considered critical incidents, those individuals who experience them have to consider the event to be critical based on their previous experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs. To effectively work through and overcome a critical incident or event Weiss et al. (2020) identifies three necessary components that should be available: (1) a thorough description of the event, (2) antecedent behaviors or events, and (3) a thorough description of the consequences.

When working through a critical incident, school leaders should interpret and describe the event, and with the support of others involved, write the story to best move upward and onward (Yamamoto et al., 2014).

While examining events considered to be critical incidents, the process supports school leaders in ethical decision-making. Furthermore, critical incidents, whether experienced directly or indirectly, have been found to have an impact on their perspectives of and how school leaders lead inclusive schools effectively (Sider et al., 2017). In order to be able to deal with critical incidents effectively, school leaders should be well balanced and well adjusted, temperate, conscientious, hard-working and enthusiastic, compassionate, tolerant and empathetic, can see the big picture and the details simultaneously, and being self-aware and the ability to self-regulate (Mander, 2008).

Yamamoto et al. (2014) addresses the idea that school leaders' emotions play a significant role in leading schools, and when critical incidents occur, that emotional well-being comes into play for how leaders respond, interpret, and manage those incidents. This can be difficult in a profession where heartstrings are pulled when working with adolescents, yet it is the expectation that one leaves the leaders' emotions aside to effectively make decisions in the best interest of the organization. However, school leaders can use these emotions to both benefit the organization and lead with authenticity, especially when leading through critical incidents (Yamamoto et al., 2014).

There are several behaviors of students who have emotional and behavioral problems that have been perceived as critical incidents including classroom disruptions, aggressive behavior, behaviors perceived as unusual, and taking unfair advantage of

special conditions (Weiss et al., 2020). School leaders have an important role in intervening in situations where students are in the antecedent stages of causing a potential event that could be considered a critical incident (Sider et al., 2017). This idea by Sider et al. (2017) leads to their findings that teamwork is an important component in leading inclusive schools.

Inclusive Leadership

The studies reviewed within this research pathway were all conducted in North American public schools. Participants included school leaders, teachers, students, and parents (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Shogren et al., 2015; Sider et al., 2017).

Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) collected data through interviews and observations, Shogren et al. (2015) collected data through interviews, observations, focus groups, and assessments, and Sider et al. (2017) used interviews to collect data. Findings of each of the studies included types of failures or critical incidents, school leaders experience while leading inclusive schools, how the school vs how parents view inclusive practices, and that school leaders are critical in leading a successful inclusive school (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Shogren et al., 2015; Sider et al., 2017).

Shogren et al. (2015) studied the process of constructing successful inclusive education practices in schools through the SWIFT (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation) framework, which supports academic, social, and behavioral success for all students. The research questions were: (1) How do the (Knowledge Development Sites) define inclusion and embody it in their school practices? (2) What are the perspectives of administrators, teachers, students, and parents on inclusive school transformation activities? (3) How, and to what degree, do the schools implement the

SWIFT domains? The sample of this study included six elementary or middle schools in three states, focusing on eighteen students. Data was collected through interviews, observations, focus groups, and assessments.

The school leaders' definition of inclusion was framed around the organization of classrooms to support diverse learners, while stakeholders' inclusion definitions were framed around where and how diverse learners learn. Both schools and the stakeholders believe that inclusive practices were directly related to the school culture. Finally, schools believed that inclusive practices were directly related to co-teaching practices. Findings related to the perspectives of administrators and teachers included defining and organization around inclusive education, building the capacity of faculty, understanding the context, family support and communication therein, how inclusion affects students, and professional development opportunities (Shogren et al., 2015).

Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) studied principals' endeavors to implement successful inclusion practices in their schools, and specifically how they learned from their failures to come out as successful. They stated their research questions as (1) How do principals in effective inclusive schools identify failures or challenges while leading for inclusion? (2) How do principals learn from and respond to failure while leading for inclusion? The sample for this study included three elementary principals in Texas, who were selected using purposeful sampling and used interviews and observations to collect data over one school year.

They found that unnecessary failures include teachers who only do what was minimally required for inclusive classrooms, teachers who do not fully participate in IEP discussions, and unprofessional co-teaching relationships. Complex coordination failures

include when students required more complex or unique support and services than their peers, co-teaching and co-planning, and not having consistency and follow-through. Finally, trial failures include IEP teams not always being able to pinpoint the best support for students, and therefore having to experiment with placements, interventions, programs, assessments, or instruction. While Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) use the language of failures, it can be seen through the sensemaking lens that those failures are actually critical incidents. In order to overcome these failures, the principals responded to and learned from them by expanding the power of their school missions, building planning teams and collaborative structures, and building and improving systems and supports (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021).

Sider et al. (2017) studied the special education training school leaders experience, day-to-day issues, and critical incidents school leaders experience related to students with disabilities. They found that school leaders are the key to creating an inclusive school by their support of all stakeholders. Furthermore, having high expectations concerning inclusive education, and communicating those expectations to all stakeholders is essential (Sider et al., 2017).

Nearly fifty years ago, the first law which supported the promotion of inclusive education came into effect and has been updated several times, however, there are still struggles in schools to effectively implement an effective inclusive education model (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). Sadly, even though this work has been ongoing for nearly fifty years, there is still little education that is given during teacher and leader preparation programs directly focusing on successful inclusive education and best practices related to inclusive practices (Sider et al., 2017). This responsibility lies with

the school leader in building an inclusive school by defining and organizing the school around inclusive education, building the capacity of faculty, understanding the context, family support and communication, understanding how inclusion affects students, and professional development opportunities (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Shogren et al., 2015). Fostering inclusive schools requires daily activities by the school leader such as being available to and being intentional about actively supporting all stakeholders through best practices. Furthermore, having high expectations concerning inclusive education, and communicating those expectations to all stakeholders is essential (Sider et al., 2017).

It is important to include all stakeholders when completing these tasks and to consider their experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs, as well as implementing a culture in which failures are seen as learning opportunities to build relationships and make practical decision (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). Shogren et al. (2015) found that the definition and embodiment of inclusion showed that the school's definition of inclusion was framed around the organization of classrooms to support diverse learners, while stakeholders' inclusion definitions were framed around where and how diverse learners learn. Shogren et al. (2015) also found that both schools and the stakeholders believe that inclusive practices were directly related to the school culture by bringing everyone together for a common goal of everyone in the school being successful.

Because this task is quite large and complex, it is expected that failures, or critical incidents, will occur, leading to effective practices. In order to overcome these failures, the principals responded to and learned from them by expanding the power of their

school missions, building planning teams and collaborative structures, and building and improving systems and supports (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021).

Finally, successful inclusive practices focus on understanding and celebrating diversity in students' abilities, cultures, and families regardless of their social or economic status, as well as a school-wide belief that all students have an important role in the learning process (Sider et al., 2017).

The Role of the School Leader in Establishing Positive School Culture

Smith et al. (2020) studied ways that principals influence a school's climate through institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior. The research questions were 'Are the dimensions of organizational climate predicted by the influence of the principal?' The hypotheses were: (1) Principal influence, students' socioeconomic status, and school size will combine to provide a significant set of predictors of institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior. (2) Principal influence will emerge as the best predictor of institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior. The sample for this study included 2,033 teachers from 112 elementary schools across two states from the southern and midwestern United States. Smith et al. (2020) used descriptive and correlational analyses to analyze surveys given to participants in this study.

They found that professional teacher behavior, how teachers behave toward students and staff, and achievement press, having and maintaining high expectations for all students, are directly and significantly impacted by principal influence (Smith et al., 2020).

Sezgin et al. (2020) studied the ways in which school leaders mentored their teachers in order to create a culture of learning at their schools. The sample for this study included ten school leaders at public schools in Turkey. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Findings demonstrated that to be an effective mentor as a school leader, one should be a continuous learner themselves while understanding that even adults need individualized support, as well as showing enthusiasm and encouraging learning (Sezgin et al., 2020).

Osiname (2016) studied leadership styles used by school principals who lead inclusive schools. The research questions were: (1) How do principals in diverse schools conceptualize and vary leadership styles to encourage and sustain an inclusive culture in the school? (2) How do principals negotiate the politics of school change to deal with difficult issues and challenging people in the school while sustaining a positive school culture? (3) How do principals build cohesive cultures in their schools while addressing challenging situations? The sample for this study included five principals in Canada, from both public and private schools. Data was collected by interviews (Osiname, 2016). They found that school leaders build an inclusive school culture in their schools by collaborating and building positive relationships, leading with encouragement, being actively involved in supporting teachers, having a growth mindset, and facing conflicts with a positive attitude (Osiname, 2016).

The most important factor in having a school that runs well and meets its goals, is productive and organized, and encourages high expectations for all students, is to have a positive school culture. School leaders who actively seek to nurture a positive school culture should focus on the collegiality of their staff for all to be able to understand one

another and their role in the school, willingly and gladly work and plan cohesively, build

trusting relationships with one another, and supporting one another so that all benefit

(Smith et al., 2020).

Furthermore, to sustain a positive school culture with these aspects, collegiality is

even more important. One way to drive collegiality with respect and trust for one another

which raises the self-confidence of the teachers is through effective mentoring from the

school leaders focusing on both career development and supporting teachers in finding

themselves as it relates to being a successful teacher. Successful mentorship, which can

be viewed as a form of ongoing professional development, supports creating a long-term

culture of learning among teachers (Sezgin et al., 2020).

Positive school culture comes from effectively utilizing stakeholders' input, the

collegiality of their staff, professionalism, and having high expectations for all (Smith et

al., 2020). Osiname (2016) introduces five important aspects of building and maintaining

a positive school culture: (1) culture, through collaboration and relationships, (2) change,

through supporting stakeholders and listening for understanding to concerns,

(3) leadership, through support, being visible, and servant leadership, (4) inclusion,

through a growth mindset, and an environment in which all feel safe and loved, and

(5) challenge, through positive attitudes and initiative. When all aspects are built into the

everyday work of the school leader, positive, inclusive school culture can be attained

(Osiname, 2016).

Finally, School leaders are the most influential factor when it comes to student

achievement, meeting and supporting faculty, and effectively meeting the needs of the

organization through being trustworthy, leading by example, showing dedication, and

encouraging stakeholders to use their talents in leading where they can (Smith et al., 2020)

Conclusions

Mander (2008) found that very little research has been conducted regarding critical incidents related to the field of education; most is related to emergency services, military, or politics. Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) discussed that although the idea of inclusive education has been around as Legislative Acts for nearly fifty years, the effective implementation of an inclusive education model has fallen short. This could be because teacher and leader preparation programs don't put emphasis on effective practices concerning inclusion, but to understand this more fully, further research should be conducted (Sider et al., 2017). Furthermore, Sider et al. (2017) talk about how critical incidents affect how school leaders lead inclusive schools, which connects research pathways one and two.

Four key generalizations are supported by multiple studies reviewed herein: (1) fostering a positive school culture includes taking into consideration and celebrating the cultures, experiences, knowledge, and beliefs of the stakeholders at the school, (2) having high expectations for all stakeholders will promote both inclusive education and positive school culture, (3) the previous experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs of those who experience an event are what determines if that event will be considered a critical event for that individual or organization, and (4) the school leader is the most influential person in the school when it comes to inclusive education practices and the school culture.

Fostering a positive school culture includes taking into consideration and celebrating the cultures, experiences, knowledge, and beliefs of the stakeholders at the school, is supported by the research from Smith et al. (2020), Coviello and DeMatthews (2021), and Sezgin et al. (2020). Smith et al. (2020) found that positive school culture comes from effectively utilizing stakeholders' input, the collegiality of their staff, professionalism, and having high expectations for all. Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) describe the importance of including all stakeholders when completing tasks and considering their experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs. Finally, the findings of Sezgin et al. (2020), found that participants believed that all stakeholder's views should be considered when the school leader is creating goals and visions for the school.

Having high expectations for all stakeholders will promote both inclusive education and positive school culture, is supported by the research from Sider et al. (2017), Smith et al. (2020), and Sezgin et al. (2020). Sider et al. (2017) says that having high expectations and communicating those expectations to all stakeholders is an essential aspect of successful inclusive practices. To do this, the focus should be on understanding and celebrating diversity in students' abilities, cultures, and families regardless of their social or economic status, as well as a school-wide belief that all students have an important role in the learning process (Sider et al., 2017). Smith et al. (2020) continues this idea by adding that the most important factor in having a school that runs well and meets its goals, is productive and organized, and encourages high expectations for all students, is to have a positive school culture. Finally, Sezgin et al. (2020) highlights that high expectations come from a positive school culture where everyone believes that all students can be successful.

Previous experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs of those who experience an event are what determines if that event will be considered a critical event for that individual or organization is supported by the research from Mander (2008), Sider et al. (2017), Weiss et al. (2020), and Yamamoto et al. (2014). Mander (2008) notes that for events to be considered critical incidents, those individuals who experience them must consider the event to be critical based on their previous experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs. Sider et al. (2017) described that events that became significant to them were the ones that they named as critical incidents. Weiss et al. (2020) found that the interpretation of problem behaviors by each teacher defined whether it would be considered a critical incident. Yamamoto et al. (2014) described emotion in relation to critical incidents. That is, the way the individual or organization views themselves and their world determines if an event will be considered a critical incident.

School leaders are the most influential persons in the school when it comes to inclusive education practices and the school culture Shogren et al. (2015), Coviello and DeMatthews (2021), Sider et al. (2017), and Smith et al. (2020). Coviello and DeMatthews (2021) and Shogren et al. (2015) say that the responsibility lies with the school leader in building an inclusive school by defining and organizing the school around inclusive education, building the capacity of faculty, understanding the context, family support, and communication, understanding how inclusion affects students, and professional development opportunities. Fostering inclusive schools requires daily activities by the school leader such as being available to and being intentional about actively supporting all stakeholders through best practices (Sider et al., 2017). Finally, School leaders are the most influential factor when it comes to student achievement,

meeting and supporting faculty, and effectively meeting the needs of the organization (Smith et al., 2020).

This research is important to school leaders and schools, so that they can have a better understanding of their own development as an inclusive leader, as well as how their teachers may have developed the practices that they use in their inclusive classrooms (Shogren et al., 2015; Sider et al., 2017).

Studies reviewed herein all focused on school leaders and teachers as the participants of their studies: several studies also included students, parents, school board officials, and/or community members as participants (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Mander, 2008; Osiname, 2016; Sezgin et al., 2020; Shogren et al., 2015; Sider et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2014). Nearly all of my significant studies used interviews as their primary methodology of collecting data. Smith et al. (2020) was the only study to use surveys. Weiss et al. (2020) and Shogren et al. (2015) used group discussions, and other data collection methods included life history, research journals/diaries, personality assessments, and observations. Data collection methods that I will use in my study include semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The current study's finding can provide school leaders with an understanding of what critical incidents are in the education setting and how they have shaped their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in their leadership development as a school leader. Survey results, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis allow for the triangulation of data collected from school leaders about how different forms of learning impacted how they learned to be effective inclusive leaders.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to learn how critical incidents shape school leaders' knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become more effective leaders in inclusive settings.

This qualitative, instrumental case study used a researcher created survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to explore the following research questions:

1. What are specific examples of critical incidents that have shaped leaders' knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become more effective leaders in inclusive settings?

2. How do critical incidents shape school leaders' leadership in inclusive schools?

The theoretical lens of this study was sensemaking. Sensemaking is about understanding, organizing, and making sense of how people and organizations respond to events that occur which are out of the ordinary to an individual or an organization and causes some sort of disruption which prompts action and evaluation.

Qualitative research was the most appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study and the research questions required that the study focused on meaning and understanding, used an inductive approach, used words to provide a thick description of the study, and because the researcher was the primary data collection instrument. According to Merriam (2014) the characteristics are hallmarks of qualitative research

The qualitative design was an instrumental case study. The case was school leaders' development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead within inclusive school settings. Through intentionally responding to critical incidents, both acute and chronic, Inclusive leaders learn through responding in real-time to the complexities of leading inclusive schools. The goal was not to create in-depth portraits of individual leaders or the school, but rather to learn how critical incidents shape leaders' perspectives, knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Case study research is particularistic, which means that the researcher can focus on specific concepts directly related to their inquiry (Merriam, 2014). Instrumental research is used when the researcher is focused on a specific issue, rather than a specific person or school (Merriam, 2014; Stake, 1995).

Primary methods of data collection were a researcher-created survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The survey asked participants to rate the degree to which four sources of learning, leadership development program(s), school district provided professional development, mentor relationship, and critical on-the-job incidents have informed their leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with inclusive leadership practices. The survey results informed the development of semi-structured interviews and provided an overview of leaders' learning. Additionally, survey results were used to triangulate findings from the other sources of data and for participant selection. Leaders were selected to participate in the study because they demonstrated through the survey that they engaged in significant learning through critical incidents. Published reports of critical incidents, school board policies, and other publicly available records, such as school board minutes and School Improvement Plans were analyzed.

Sample Selection

Nonprobability, purposeful sampling was used to select both research sites and primary participants. The following criteria were used to identify research sites: (1) schools where the entire leadership team agreed for me to have access to the school leadership, (2) schools that include at least Kindergarten through Fourth Grade (elementary level), and (3) schools where leaders indicated through the survey that they engaged in significant professional learning associated with critical incidents. Leaders from each identified site were contacted to identify participants for the study. Five leaders from five different schools were interviewed and provided documents for the study. The salient characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Interviewees	Total Years in Education	Total Years as a School Leader	Previous Roles	Current Role	Male/Female
School Leader 1 (SL1)	16 years	5 years	Classroom Teacher Leadership Coach Assistant Principal	District TAP Coordinator	Female
School Leader 2 (SL2)	25 years	14 years	Classroom Teacher Counselor Master Teacher Instructional Coach Assistant Principal	Well-Being Specialist	Female
School Leader 3 (SL3)	29 years	9 years	School Psychologist Behavior Interventionist Pupil Appraisal Supervisor	Director of Special Education	Female
School Leader 4 (SL4)	12 years	8 years	Classroom Teacher Mentor Teacher Master Teacher Curriculum Coach	Assistant Principal	Female
School Leader 5 (SL5)	14 years	3 years	Classroom Teacher Gifted Education Teacher	Mentor Teacher	Female

Data Collection

The current study collected data for research purposes, including a researcher created school leader survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Each subsection describes how the researcher collected data and the relevance of their use in this study to further the research questions.

Researcher Created Survey

The Council for Exceptional Children's Advanced Administrator of Special Education Standards (Council for Exceptional Children, 2022) and the State of Louisiana

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Performance Expectations (Louisiana

Department of Administration, 2019) were analyzed to identify a subset of the standards

which were most directly pertinent to inclusive leadership. An initial subset of standards

was identified by comparing the standards to salient aspects of inclusive leadership

represented within the relevant research literature (Council for Exceptional Children,

2022; Louisiana Department of Administration, 2019). The subset of standards was

reviewed by two experts in inclusive leadership to establish face validity of the subset of

standards.

A survey instrument was created (see Appendix A) which tasked respondents

with responding to each item on the survey and rating on a scale of one to seven, the

degree to which their professional knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with the

item was derived through critical incidents, in-service professional development through

a school district, leadership preparation program, and mentorship relationships. The

survey provided an overview of professional learning through each of the primary means

of professional learning identified through the literature review. The primary purpose of

the survey was to determine which items involved the highest levels of learning through

critical incidents. The results of the survey were used to create a graphic to demonstrate

the outcomes of the survey, inform the development of an initial set of interview

questions and to identify potential sites and participants for the case study.

Interviews

Based on analysis of the survey results and using key ideas from the research literature, an initial set of semi-structured interview questions was created. The initial set of questions was alpha tested by two experts in inclusive leadership. The interview protocol was then beta tested by completing full interviews with three participants who met the criteria for participant selection. The interview questions were found to be effective in eliciting extended, thoughtful responses to each of the open-ended prompts. Five school leaders were interviewed. Field notes were taken during the Zoom interviews and initial analysis was completed immediately following each interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy. Key takeaways from the interviews were shared with interviewees in follow-up sessions as a means of member-checking the accuracy of the researcher's perceptions.

Documents

Study participants were asked to provide documents which they believed to be potentially relevant to the study. Documents included a grant proposal, reflective journals, school improvement plans, professional development agendas, published articles, and an interview transcript from a school leader interview that had been done in the context of a previous study.

Data Analysis

The data set consisted of transcribed semi-structured interviews, direct observation notes, and documents. I began analyzing the data while still collecting the data. I determined themes or key ideas to categorize my data. Through the process, I took notes about my thoughts and ideas regarding the data, including what was learning and

speculating along the way (Merriam, 2014). I maintained an inventory of my entire data set, so I always knew precisely what data I collected, when it was collected, and from whom it was collected. I used both handwritten notes and digitized notes. I typed my notes into an online database for collection.

To analyze my data, I used the Merriam (2014) protocol. First, I used open coding to take notes regarding each piece of collected data and begin to group together similar pieces. I kept a running log of the groups and categories I created and continued this process through each data set. Completing the first set allowed me to begin to see the trends in my collected data. As I continued, I created subcategories and began naming specific categories. I followed this protocol for naming the categories to ensure that the categories support answering the research questions. Finally, I created visual representations of my data collection and analysis.

I used the constant comparative method for data analysis, which is based upon the procedures detailed above. Ultimately, the constant comparative method supported the identification of patterns in the data by comparing the created groups or categories and comparing them with one another (Merriam, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Merriam (2014) recommends that validity and reliability should be discussed in each study in a manner that parallels the researcher's philosophical paradigm, which in this case, is social constructivism. Because this study is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, traditional language and practices related to validity and reliability are not the best fit because they suggest that validity and reliability can be quantified. Trustworthiness is a better fit with the theoretical assumptions and

methodology which inform this study. To establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I followed the Lincoln and Guba (1985) evaluative criteria.

Credibility

I maintained credibility by spending ample time collecting observation data to become very familiar with the settings and situations, built a rapport with those being observed, and developed a deep enough understanding that preconceptions were no longer an issue. I also observed in a way that ensured I was observing the behaviors and events that support my understanding of the key items in my study, to provide a depth of understanding to those being observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, any assertions that were made that could be contested in some way were triangulated to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). I employed four triangulation protocols, (1) data source: does "what we are observing and reporting carry the same meaning when found under different circumstances?" (Stake, 1995, p. 113), (2) investigator: when "we have other researchers take a look at the same scene or phenomenon" (Stake, 1995, p. 113), (3) theory: "the extent to which [the researchers] describe the phenomenon with similar detail" (Stake, 1995, p. 113), and (4) methodological: using the collected observation, interview, and document analysis data "to increase confidence in our interpretation" (Stake, 1995, p. 114).

Next, I used peer debriefing to understand any biases or attitudes I may have toward the collected data, as well as work through hypotheses therein (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I looked at the data that had been set aside, rather than originally analyzed, and analyzed it to evaluate the level of validity of my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, I followed up with interviewees regarding the key points I took away from the interview, as a form of member checking the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

Transferability

Generalizations are difficult to make when conducting case study research. I used thick, narrative descriptions, as well as my own assertions in describing my study, to allow the reader to feel as though they lived that experience, which will support the building of naturalistic generalizations by the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

Dependability

I maintained dependability in my study by having a peer and my dissertation committee review my data collection and analysis methods and ensure that all areas of my study are speaking the same language and are supported by my data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

As with dependability, a peer and my dissertation committee reviewed my data collection and analysis methods and ensured that all areas of my study are speaking the same language and supported by my data collection and analysis to ensure confirmability. Furthermore, I maintained a detailed audit trail with my data collection process. The audit trail includes (1) raw data, (2) data reduction and analysis products, (3) data reconstruction and synthesis products, (4) process notes, (5) materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and (5) instrument development information (Halpern, 1983). As with credibility, any assertions that are made that may be contested in some way,

those statements will be triangulated to ensure trustworthiness and also ensure

confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

Delimitations

Delimitations are topics related to my focus that I could include in my study, but I

won't. For example, I could investigate all of the ways leaders learn about leading

inclusive settings, or at a range of factors that affect school leaders' leadership inclusive

settings, such as educational background, certification requirements, or job duties. My

focus, however, is on the critical incidents that shape school leaders' leadership in

inclusive schools.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Within this chapter results from the survey of school leaders are presented first. This is followed by findings associated with learning through critical incidents, finding associated with specific knowledge skills and disposition of leaders, and finally findings about how leaders learn. The findings about how leaders learn are presented as significant themes.

Findings from School Leader Survey

Table 2 shows the findings from the survey. Survey results show that leaders of inclusive schools develop knowledge skills and dispositions through critical incidents (CI), in-service professional development (IS), leadership preparation programs (LPP) and mentorship relationships (MR). Respondents scored learning through critical incidents highest of the four modes of learning in all but one competency area: School leaders effectively manage financials and use funds to support teaching and learning in their schools. Respondents indicated that their primary mode of learning about this competency was through a mentorship relationship. Competencies with mean rankings for learning through critical incidents which fell below 6.0 tended to have lower mean rankings for learning through the other modes as well. This might be because inclusive

leaders feel that these competencies are less critical to success as leaders in inclusive

settings.

Table 2

School Leaders' Perception of How They Learned to Lead Inclusive Schools

Statements Created Using LAE and CEC Standards	Form of Learning	% Rating 6 or 7	Mean	Mode
School leaders use data from a variety of sources to support teachers in their teaching and learning practices with inclusive classrooms.	CI	83.3	6.16	7
	IS	54.2	5.2	6
	LPP	41.7	4.8	7
	MR	50.0	5	6
School leaders follow safety regulations to keep their campuses safe for all students, including students with disabilities.	CI	83.3	6.33	7
	IS	37.5	4.75	5
	LPP	41.7	4.65	7
	MR	41.6	4.87	5
School leaders advocate for all stakeholders to hold high expectations for diverse learners, in which all students have access to equitable and appropriate learning opportunities.	CI	79.2	6.08	7
	IS	41.7	4.62	6
	LPP	54.2	5	6
	MR	37.5	4.5	4
School leaders use data from a variety of sources to support inclusive classrooms.	CI	79.2	6.25	7
	IS	25.0	4.66	4
	LPP	41.6	4.62	5
	MR	20.8	4.6	5
School leaders lead teachers in professional growth that supports the appropriate use of accommodations for inclusive classrooms.	CI	79.2	6.15	7
	IS	33.3	4.83	5
	LPP	25.0	4.41	5
	MR	29.2	4.54	4
School leaders use voices from a diverse stakeholder population to create their vision, mission, and goals for their school.	CI	79.1	5.95	6
	IS	23.4	4.62	4
	LPP	33.4	4.29	5
	MR	25.0	4.5	7
School leaders support teachers in appropriately and effectively implementing curriculum, including providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	CI	79.1	6.12	7
	IS	50.0	5.45	5
	LPP	33.3	4.54	4
	MR	33.4	4.62	7

Statements Created Using LAE and CEC Standards	Form of Learning	% Rating 6 or 7	Mean	Mode
School leaders communicate and act equitably with all stakeholders.	CI	75.0	6.16	7
	IS	29.1	4.62	4
	LPP	41.7	5	5
	MR	50.0	4.79	6
School leaders use data, research, and best practices to support teaching and learning related to inclusive classrooms.	CI	75.0	6.12	7
	IS	58.4	5.29	6
	LPP	45.9	4.95	7
	MR	41.7	4.95	4
School leaders lead teachers in professional development that supports their instruction with inclusive classrooms.	CI	75.0	6.2	7
	IS	54.1	5.16	6
	LPP	37.5	4.7	6
	MR	41.7	4.62	4
School leaders have high expectations for current and potential teachers and work to keep high quality personnel, especially those who work well with inclusive classrooms.	CI	75.0	6	7
	IS	29.2	4.08	2
	LPP	33.3	4.95	6
	MR	54.2	4.41	4
School leaders evaluate objectively, keeping student learning and best interests in mind.	CI	75.0	5.87	7
	IS	45.9	4.87	6
	LPP	41.7	5	7
	MR	45.9	4.79	7
School leaders provide collaboration and professional development that supports teaching and learning, identification, and placement of students with disabilities.	CI	74.4	5.83	6
	IS	37.5	4.95	5
	LPP	25.0	4.5	5
	MR	25.0	4.16	4
School leaders support teachers in reflecting on their own values and beliefs as they relate to the school's vision and goals for teaching in inclusive classrooms.	CI	70.9	5.91	7
	IS	14.2	4.5	4
	LPP	37.5	4.62	5
	MR	37.5	4.66	6
School leaders monitor progress of students with disabilities and support teachers in understanding up-to-date educational policies and procedures related to teaching inclusive classrooms.	CI	70.8	6.08	7
	IS	29.7	4.79	4
	LPP	37.5	4.33	4
	MR	25.0	4.5	5
School leaders ensure that students with disabilities receive equipment and technologies that will support their learning in the inclusive classrooms.	CI	70.8	6.08	7
	IS	41.6	5	5
	LPP	41.7	4.25	7
	MR	41.7	4.79	7

Statements Created Using LAE and CEC Standards	Form of Learning	% Rating 6 or 7	Mean	Mode
School leaders advocate for inclusive classrooms through high expectations, equity, openness, caring, and trust.	CI	70.8	6.08	7
	IS	25.0	4.58	5
	LPP	45.9	4.62	5
	MR	33.4	4.58	7
School leaders collaborate with stakeholders with conflicting perspectives about education to build a rapport and ultimately become positive supports for the school.	CI	70.8	5.58	6
	IS	16.7	3.66	4
	LPP	33.4	4.12	5
	MR	16.7	4.25	2
School leaders use their school vision, mission, and goals in order to implement programs and services to support inclusive classrooms.	CI	70.8	5.91	7
	IS	33.3	4.87	4
	LPP	45.8	4.5	5
	MR	25.0	4.87	6
School leaders use feedback to support teachers in teaching and learning practices that are culturally responsive.	CI	66.7	6.08	7
	IS	29.1	4.45	5
	LPP	45.8	4.62	5
	MR	33.4	4.91	7
School leaders involve families in the decision-making process.	CI	66.7	5.79	7
	IS	25.0	4.16	4
	LPP	29.1	4.29	5
	MR	29.2	4.37	5
School leaders collaborate with community stakeholders to support the teaching and learning of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	CI	66.7	5.54	6
	IS	12.5	3.79	3
	LPP	41.6	3.91	5
	MR	16.6	4.62	7
School leaders use progress monitoring systems that provide meaningful data	CI	66.6	5.83	7
	IS	50.0	5.2	6
	LPP	29.2	4.41	7
	MR	41.6	4.87	5
School leaders are abreast of current strategies, research, and technologies that will support inclusive classrooms.	CI	66.6	5.83	7
	IS	25.0	4.37	4
	LPP	33.3	4.33	7
	MR	33.4	4.54	4
School leaders evaluate and apply evidence-based practices for engaging all stakeholders in upholding the vision, mission, and goals of the school.	CI	62.5	5.75	7
	IS	41.7	4.87	6
	LPP	41.7	4.95	7
	MR	33.3	4.54	4

Statements Created Using LAE and CEC Standards	Form of Learning	% Rating 6 or 7	Mean	Mode
School leaders are ethical and fair, practicing integrity and justice through their conduct, relationships, decision-making, and supervision of resources to support inclusive classrooms.	CI	62.5	5.87	7
	IS	37.5	4.83	4
	LPP	45.8	4.75	6
	MR	41.6	4.87	7
School leaders create instructional teams to analyze student work and progress to develop strategies to support teachers and students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	CI	62.4	5.95	7
	IS	54.1	5.41	7
	LPP	37.5	4.54	5
	MR	33.3	4.62	4
School leaders use a variety of student data to support and improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	CI	58.4	5.66	7
	IS	37.5	4.7	4
	LPP	41.6	4.58	5
	MR	33.4	4.58	6
School leaders stay abreast to current research regarding teaching and learning strategies for inclusive classrooms.	CI	58.3	5.79	7
	IS	25.0	4.66	5
	LPP	50.0	4.91	7
	MR	20.8	4.33	5
School leaders use teacher accountability measures to improve the teaching and learning practices for inclusive classrooms.	CI	58.3	5.58	7
	IS	25.0	4.62	4
	LPP	50.0	4.5	7
	MR	20.8	4.5	5
School leaders connect their families to community agencies to support the whole child.	CI	58.3	5.37	7
	IS	20.8	3.91	2
	LPP	29.1	3.95	7
	MR	33.3	4.37	4
School leaders respect diversity by learning about their communities.	CI	58.3	5.75	7
	IS	20.8	4.12	2
	LPP	41.6	4.7	5
	MR	37.5	4.79	7
School leaders understand and adhere to educational policies and support inclusive classrooms ethically.	CI	58.3	6.04	7
	IS	33.3	4.79	5
	LPP	50.0	4.62	5
	MR	33.4	5.08	7
School leaders effectively manage financials and use funds to support teaching and learning in their schools. *	CI	54.2	5.62	7
	IS	25.0	4.16	3
	LPP	41.7	4.62	7
	MR	58.3	5.29	6

Statements Created Using LAE and CEC Standards	Form of Learning	% Rating 6 or 7	Mean	Mode
School leaders celebrate diversity and use it to strengthen their current practices.	CI	54.2	5.62	7
	IS	33.3	4.5	4
	LPP	37.5	4.41	4
	MR	37.5	4.41	2
School leaders help community stakeholders understand the vision and goals for their inclusive schools.	CI	54.2	5.54	7
	IS	20.8	3.87	3
	LPP	33.4	4.29	5
	MR	29.2	4.58	7
School leaders collaborate with community programs and develop and implement policies, processes, and procedures to support students with disabilities.	CI	41.7	5.08	7
	IS	4.2	3.58	4
	LPP	29.2	4.08	4
	MR	29.8	4.12	2

Note. CI=Critical Incidents: IS=In-Service Professional Development Program: LPP=Leadership Development Program: MR=Mentorship Relationship

Overall, 79% of respondents rated learning through critical incidents as the greatest source of learning how to lead in inclusive settings. The overall means of Leadership Preparation Program: 4.6, Mentorship Relationship: 4.58, In-service Professional Learning Through District: 4.6, and Critical Incidents: 5.88 demonstrate that school leaders learn and put into practice the standards needed to be an effective inclusive leader through responding to on-the-job demands, or critical incidents. These means also demonstrate that none of the four sources are adequately developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders in inclusive settings. There were three respondents whose answers demonstrated that their mentorship relationship and critical incidents taught them equally as much about being an effective inclusive leader.

Learning Through Critical Incidents

Two categories of critical incidents were identified. The first type of critical incident is an out-of-the-norm, one-time, or first-time event, which the school leaders responded to and learned from. This kind of critical incident is categorized as acute because it is of limited duration and no longer of concern once resolved. While the specific incident is no longer of concern once resolved, frequently, the incident leads to efforts to mitigate the likelihood of a similar future occurrence. The second kind of critical incident is one that unfolds over time through an ongoing situation that generally involves more people than just the leader. These kinds of critical incidents are categorized as chronic incidents because they are longer-term situations that require complex long-term solutions.

Critical Incidents Through Acute Incidents

School Leader 1 described an abrupt situation that affected everyone in the school. They made the decision to place students into classes that had previously excluded special education students. This sudden change created a critical incident as the leader was required to learn how to best support teachers during this change. The leaders learned through the incident by prompting new questions which they answered through collaboration with teachers and students whom the change affected.

> When I first came here, it was not inclusive. A lot of kids hadn't been in regular classes in years. When I changed that, it was a struggle for me and the kids, and I was trying to figure out why it was so difficult. It was a change for them to be with other kids again. Learning how to deal with the behaviors and understanding

where it came from was a huge learning curve for me and the teachers. There were reasons behind them. We just needed to figure those out [SL1].

School Leader 2 described an incident with a student who required immediate response with significant negative consequences to the student. The incident triggered a strong emotional response from the leader and led them through a process of introspection. Ultimately, the leader became an advocate for change. They collaborated with others to develop new policies and practices. They developed proactive strategies to avoid similar incidents from occurring and new policies to guide the response in the event that similar incidents would occur in the future.

> I had a situation where a student brought a box of razor blades to school. He passed them out to all of their friends, and they all cut themselves, and there was blood everywhere. When I went to my principal to ask how to handle it, the student was smart and had no issues prior, he did something dumb; he did not do it out of malice. The principal said you have to follow the disciplinary action matrix. The kid was expelled. I was distraught and could not sleep for weeks. I could not stand that we got rid of this kid. I asked everyone I could. I knew this was the wrong thing to do, but I did it anyway because I was forced. So at this moment, I made it my business to change what the policy was and that schools shouldn't have to follow it explicitly. We should have to look at the kid's intent and to teach kids that it wasn't the right thing to do. We don't teach behavior like we do other subjects, but we need it. This drove me to find alternate means of dealing with behavior and really being an advocate for the children and the families [SL2].

School Leader 2 described an incident that helped them better understand their students and the community from which the students come. In this case, the incident happened to the leader themselves. The leader learned through the incident through introspection. They were able to compare the experience they had in a local church with the way students experienced school. This led the leader to collaborate with their staff to implement pedagogical strategies which were more aligned with the life experience of the students.

> I was invited to a church where a lot of our students and support staff attended. I went and was completely engrossed in it, and it really informed me of the culture; I was sitting there for hours, and everyone was standing up, hollering, saying amen, etc., and were encouraged to get up, walk around, get up when they want, get up and go get a snack, etc. it's a different way of church for me. When I compared that to how we do school, I realized these kids are encouraged to do things one way at home and church, but the way we do school is the opposite; don't get up, don't talk, ask permission for everything; which is the opposite of how they are growing up. Seeing that made me realize we needed to do things differently. Out of that came a lot of work in collaborative learning and hands-on instruction [SL2].

Inclusive leaders create opportunities for stakeholders to experience what they hope to be critical incidents which will cause stakeholders to learn through self-reflection and personal development. One such inclusive leader initiated such an experience which was described in their reflective journal:

When presented with the opportunity to share with the focus group, I asked the

parents to first share their experiences with the group in their native language

because I believed this would address the language barrier issue for everyone in

attendance and make the most initial impact. Secondly, because many of the

group members would not understand what the parents were saying, it would

reinforce what these parents were experiencing with school staff who did not

understand them.

I introduced the parents and told the group what I had asked them to do. The

parents shared their views in Spanish and Arabic with much confusion from the

group. When asked how the group felt after the parents shared their experiences in

their native language, some group members reported that they thought the parents

were angry. Others reported being frustrated because they did not understand

what they were saying. I then asked the parents to relate their concerns and

experiences to the group in English. While this was easier for the group to

comprehend, concern and frustration were still present [SL].

School Leader 5 described an incident between themselves and a parent, which

elicited a strong emotional response that led to introspection. Through introspection, the

leader learned about their personal dispositions and formulated personal aspirations and

developed aspirational plans on how to deal with future incidents.

I had a situation with a parent who wanted to meet with me, and the meeting did

not go well at all. It was almost an interrogation. It was disheartening and

discouraging for me, but it was something that taught me resilience and was a

prime example of how I could carry myself with poise moving forward and that I

needed to put forth all efforts for students and parents to know we were all

working together [SL5].

Critical Incidents Through Chronic Learning

Leaders described becoming aware of teachers' values and beliefs about inclusive

classrooms as critical incidents which unfolded over time. They described responding to

deeply held beliefs and cultural norms within the school as challenging but essential work

to lead within inclusive settings effectively. Leaders identified developing awareness of

the beliefs, values, biases, and assumptions held by the teaching staff and leaders at both

the school and district level as critical learning that can only take place through

experiencing critical incidents. They expressed that working to change the mindsets of

educators was challenging work. Leaders responded to these chronic situations by

developing one-on-one relationships with teachers, persistent communications with

teachers and district leaders, and having hard conversations.

School Leader 2 said, "There are people around you with a different philosophy

that may need to be undone or changed. I had to help them in moving from black and

white to gray to see that every child is unique [SL2]." School Leader 3 said:

One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands it. They

think it's not fair. They think, why do we have to have these kids in our room and

disrupt their learning? But, those students also need to learn and access the

general curriculum and their peers. There are some people who have deep-rooted

mindsets that don't allow for an inclusive setting [SL3].

School Leader 2 also said, "One of the hardest things or biggest challenges is reframing

the language that's used in schools. Helping people see that we need to speak about

children in a better way and having to undo habits that people don't even realize they have [SL2]." School Leader 1 said she "had to train teachers to not take it so personally. I had to have one on one conversations with teachers to help them understand the why behind the behaviors and to not hold grudges. It's a new day every day [SL1]." School Leader 2 said:

> People have ingrained thoughts. They think this is the way they've always done it. It was hard going against that when it comes to punishment and punitive action. They think this is the way I was raised; spanking or consequences for everything, harsh or punitive. Challenging and undoing that mindset, going against policies even, I caught a lot of flak for that - I worked hard to show people in leadership and administrative positions that we are going to do things a different way. It takes a lot of work to look at the whole child; restorative practices; instead of blanket punishments [SL2].

School Leader 3 expressed similar thoughts by saying one of the hardest parts about being a school leader in an inclusive setting is "Mindsets, beliefs, territorial kinds of things and having those difficult conversations [SL3]."

Although relationship building is hard, the positive outcomes are well worth the investment. School Leader 2 said, "One of the biggest things is that you have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others, bringing people together, and forming relationships and modeling [SL2]." School Leader 5 said, "I think that developing a relationship with students is of the utmost importance. It starts with relationships. The relationship covers everything. Start with the heart and build that relationship, and you will be able to manage more effectively [SL5]." School Leader 2 said that "being

intentional about speaking to parents, getting yelled at, and then building that relationship

back up - they knew they could come to me, and I would hear them and listen to them

[SL2]." School Leader 3 expressed similar sentiments by saying:

> inclusive leaders need to be able to have conversations with people in honest
>
> ways, and learning from those perspectives is what I like the most. Not just the
>
> team but the parents and all the stakeholders working together. What is the goal,
>
> and how can we get all kids moving? Inclusivity includes everyone: kids, staff,
>
> and parents [SL3].

Another kind of critical incident described is existing situations that are ongoing

but new to the leader. One leader described encountering a student who came to the

school already identified with severe emotional issues. They responded to this student by

collaborating to create an action plan which involved all the teachers and administrators

who worked with this student. They described how it is important to monitor the

students, build relationships with the student and develop strategies specific to the

student's needs. Leader 5 said:

> I had a student who had severe emotional issues. She was just coming into the
>
> school from homeschool and virtual school. We created an action plan for her in
>
> meeting with her. It didn't seem to work out as well in the beginning. Typically,
>
> when we don't have students in the elective, we will meet with them on a weekly
>
> level if they aren't taking college courses. However, with this student, we made a
>
> lot of different changes to make sure she had a positive experience in moving into
>
> high school. I was building a relationship with her and putting different strategies
>
> into place to accommodate her and to help address those emotional and mental

needs of the student. This was pivotal to me because it was such an extreme case.

We had to do things that were unorthodox [SL5].

Another sort of critical incident that is a chronic situation presented as new to the leader occurred when the leader first came to a new position and had to understand and respond to the existing complexities within the school environment. School Leader 2 said:

When I came to my school as principal, there were a lot of racial inequities. Most of the teaching staff was white, and the support staff was black. It was an obvious racial divide, and tension was there. I observed and witnessed that this was a problem. We also had a huge divide in our teaching staff, teaching students who were from extreme areas of poverty and not understanding the students at all. This was due to the shift of demographics in the school; then, the elementary schools changed. They pulled the wealthier kids and put them in other schools, and we got more kids who were not from those areas. The teachers were frustrated in not knowing how to teach students from a certain demographic. I knew we had to do something differently. We went on a bus and went and saw where the kids came from. We did education surrounding inequities and racial and Ruby Payne's work - understanding how different children learned [SL2].

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Through experiencing critical incidents, mentoring relationships, graduate degrees, trial and error, and interpersonal relationships, school leaders formed knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective school leaders in an inclusive setting. The following section describes specific knowledge skills and dispositions which leaders

see as essential and contextualizes the learning they experienced to develop essential

knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Knowledge

School Leaders described some ways that they attained their knowledge of being

a school leader. School Leader 4 said, "my master's program allowed me to take the

classes, so I understood leadership theoretically [SL4]." School Leader 1 said, "I learned

the most when I became a principal. We don't train teachers or principals for what we

deal with [SL1]." School Leaders 1 and 3 described similar experiences. School Leader 1

said, "I learned a lot through trial-by-fire and being thrown in the middle of it [SL1]," and

School Leader 3 said I learned how to be a school leader through trial-by-fire, on-the-job

training, making mistakes and having those moments where you see that didn't work well

what do I need to do [SL3]." School Leader 3 said they "also worked with the special

education department to learn there [SL1]."

Some school leaders had mentors who supported them in learning how to be

effective school leaders in an inclusive setting. School Leader 4 said, "when I was under

[principal] as a teacher, they would build my capacity by saying, 'here's a learning

moment for you when you move up' and asked what I would do in this situation [SL4]."

School Leader 3 also said, "I also learned from mentors that I looked at and who were

successful, inclusive, and fair. They took me under their wing to learn those skills [SL3]."

Knowledge is also formed through building relationships with others. School

Leader 5 said, "Some of the joys are coming across individuals from different

backgrounds, and it makes you a more well-rounded person and opportunities to grow

and learn. [SL5]." She went on to say, "you have different experiences on a day-to-day

basis based on discussions in the classroom, and I love that I get to know people from all different backgrounds, have in-depth conversations, and address concerns that students may have and open that up to everyone else [SL5]."

School leaders discussed the knowledge needed to support students successfully. School Leader 2 said, "It takes a lot of work to look at the whole child; restorative practices; instead of blanket punishments. It's easier to say let's write this kid off than working with the kid and the family and trying to do something different [SL2]." School Leader 1 said, "Learning how to deal with the behaviors and understanding where it came from was a huge learning curve for me and the teachers. There were reasons behind them. We just needed to figure those out [SL1]." School Leader 2 said, "We should have to look at the kids' intent and teach kids that it wasn't the right thing to do. We don't teach behavior like we do other subjects, but we need it [SL2]." School Leader 3 discussed when working through issues, it takes all stakeholders to put their knowledge together by saying, "not just the team, but the parents and all of the stakeholders working together. What is the goal, and how can we get all kids moving? Inclusivity includes everyone: kids, staff, and parents [SL3]." School Leader 1 said that school leaders need to focus on "really learning not only about their disability but also their home life and getting to know kids beyond their disability - asking them who you are and what do you enjoy. [SL1]."

School Leader 2 said to support the staff in learning more about their students, "we went on a bus, and we saw where the kids came from. We did education surrounding inequities and racial and Ruby Payne's work - understanding how different children learned [SL2]." School Leader 3 said, "we also have to remember that just because it

worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today [SL3]." School Leader 3 also discussed that behaviors change over time and that environmental factor such as COVID introduced a new set of challenges by saying, "this year, the problems with behaviors are more complex, more severe, and I'm trying to figure out how I can make an impact and help that [SL3]." Along with this, School leader 3 said, "COVID forced us to take a look at what we're doing and ask ourselves if it was working - some kids do better with technology and one-on-one [SL3]."

Another important idea, one that feels difficult as a leader in any capacity, came from School Leader 5, who said, "you don't always know what to do, and you feel like you fall short [SL5]." School Leader 1 had a similar thought in regard to using all of your knowledge to find a solution, "we have to be able to think through our processes and not punish students for things that are out of their control [SL1]." School leader 2 thought back to when she began as a school leader and when she did not have the knowledge, she needed by saying, "as a first-time Assistant Principal of discipline, this was not my wheelhouse, and not where I found myself to be knowledgeable. At the time, this was my weakest area; I didn't understand why teachers had discipline problems [SL2]."

Finally, being a life-long learner is an important aspect of being a school leader in an inclusive setting. School Leader 5 reiterated this by saying, "I want to look at each experience as a learning experience and a time to grow [SL5]."

School leaders learned theoretical knowledge about how to lead an inclusive school through their leadership preparation programs. They learned the most, however, by being immersed in the work when they earned the position as a school leader. They used the knowledge of other leaders in their districts to support their knowledge, such as

the special education department. They had mentors who saw the potential in them when they were a teacher who supported their knowledge before stepping into the leadership role, and mentors during their time as a new leader to support them. They also built their knowledge by learning about their stakeholders and building relationships therein. School leaders described supporting their staff in building their knowledge related to supporting students in the classroom and their mindsets, as well as using the stakeholder's knowledge about students to support their students better. School leaders finally said that it is frustrating when they don't have the knowledge to know what to do in certain situations; however, since leaders are life-long learners, they will use one of the above ways to learn about what they should do in those situations.

Skills

School Leaders described some of the skills school leaders must possess in order to be effective school leaders in an inclusive school. School Leader 3 said in general, "you have to learn some skills and some you have to unlearn [SL3]." School Leader 1 said, "it takes a special kind of intentionality to be inclusive [SL1]." School Leader 3 said, "to work in an inclusive setting you have to have a voice and allow people to have a voice to discuss concerns and issues and so things are working so everyone is on the same page [SL3]." School Leader 5 said, "it takes innovation, quick thinking, the understanding that everything may not go according to plan and that that is OK [SL5]." School Leader 2 described that something she didn't realize before becoming a leader of an inclusive school was "the intentionality and consistency you have to have; you have to think about every action you have that you're showing in that school because it affects

the school. They're modeling your behavior whether you believe it or not [SL2]." School Leader 5 said that "relationship building is how I define effective leadership [SL5]."

Some of the skills discussed were related to working with staff and stakeholders. School Leader 2 said,

Making the environment where people want to be makes it more fun to do the job because you have happy people, who want to be there, smiling and laughing when they walk in. That's how you know you have it established. A good climate and culture are those benefits [SL2].

School Leader 3 said that "being able to have conversations with people in honest ways and learning from those perspectives is what I like the most [SL3]." School Leader 2 said, "you have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others; bringing people together and forming relationships and modeling [SL2]." School Leader 5 said, "I have to be innovative, build relationships, mediate, and come up with solutions, etc. being an educator has led me to have ways to come up with ideas and share those with other educators [SL5]." School Leader 5 also said, "I appreciate this too about being an educator because we have a supportive admin who allows you to implement the things our students need [SL5]." School Leader 1 said, "I also had to train teachers to not take it so personally. I had to have one on one conversations with teachers to help them understand the why behind the behaviors and to not hold grudges. It's a new day every day [SL1]."

Simply knowing that something needs to be done to make a positive change is also essential, which was brought up by School Leader 2 when she said, "the teachers were frustrated in not knowing how to teach students from a certain demographic. I knew

we had to do something differently [SL2]." School Leader 5 discussed not letting disheartening situations keep you down but instead allowing that to teach her "resilience and was a prime example of how I could carry myself with poise moving forward and that I needed to put forth all efforts for students and parents to know we were all working together. [SL5]" School Leader 2 said, "being intentional about speaking to parents, getting yelled at, and then building that relationship back up - they knew they could come to me and I would hear them and listen to them [SL2]."

Another set of skills discussed was related to working with students. School Leader 2 said you "must be tenacious - not letting anything let you give up on that kid [SL2]." School Leader 5 said, "It takes a love of education and students in order to be successful [SL5]." School Leader 1 said one of the most important things was "being patient, researching, and understanding kids. [SL1]" as well as understanding that one of "the biggest things were stopping and not letting my emotions get ahead of me when I was getting cursed out and finding out the why of them based on their disabilities [SL1]." School Leader 2 said, "this drove me to find alternate means in dealing with behavior and really being an advocate for the children and the families [SL2]." School Leader 3 said, regarding the challenges brought forth by COVID,

> The silver lining of these events includes increasing tech skills and teachers looking at improving instructional practices. A lot of good things have come out of that. For me, I learned how to be flexible and have a more open mind about some of these things [SL3].

School Leader 4 said, "numbers aren't everything. You must do your job to show you're an effective teacher. To do that you have to meet their needs day in and day out [SL4]."

Another set of skills discussed was related to working with district leadership. School Leader 4 discussed the lack of support that comes from district leadership, which shows a lack of skills therein by saying she was "Not feeling supported enough from district leadership. People come and talk and talk and talk but don't give you an actual solution to the problem [SL4]." School Leader 2 said, "I worked hard to show people in leadership and administrative positions that we are going to do things a different way [SL2]." School Leader 1 said, "there were times I had to push to have my kids get what they needed. I had to fight for things to ensure that my kids got what the other kids in the district got and that they were allowed to do things [SL1]."

Primarily though experiencing critical incidents school leaders learn, or even unlearn, skills and support others in gaining or unlearning the skills needed to lead inclusive schools effectively. One of the main skills needed as a school leader is intentionality to build relationships and to care about others, which includes all stakeholders. Not only between the leader and the stakeholder, but also supporting that growth between the stakeholders as a mediator or liaison of that. Another set of skills needed is tenacity and resilience. School leaders must also be able to support building staff up as leaders in their building. School leaders must also be innovative in finding solutions to problems they have never faced before, such as a global pandemic. Finally, understanding how to work with district leadership to ensure your students and staff get what they need is another skill school leaders should possess if they are to lead inclusive schools effectively.

Dispositions

Dispositions of inclusive leaders are very important. Without the appropriate dispositions, inclusive leaders would be less successful. School Leader 4 stated, "every student counts. Every student matters [SL4], which embodies the essence of every other statement related to dispositions from the data analysis.

Inclusive leaders develop dispositions related to school culture and climate. School Leader 2 said, "The leader directly controls the culture and climate, so even when I didn't want to be peppy and inclusive, etc. I had to put it on my face anyway [SL2]." School Leader 2 also said,

> Making the environment where people want to make it more fun to do the job
>
> because you have happy people, who want to be there, smiling and laughing when
>
> they walk in. That's how you know you have it established. A good climate and
>
> culture are those benefits [SL2].

School leader 3 said, "I need to have the buy-in so we can work toward a shared mission and vision and align those to that. We may not always agree but we can come to some agreement for how this can work for kids [SL3]."

Inclusive leaders not only develop their personal dispositions to lead in inclusive settings but also value changing dispositions that their staff hold. "Mindsets, beliefs, territorial kinds of things and having those difficult conversations [SL3]," School Leader 3 says, are one of the more difficult aspects of leading an inclusive school. Related to this idea, School leader 2 said:

> It was hard going against that when it comes to punishment and punitive action.
>
> They think this is the way I was raised; spanking or consequences for everything,

harsh or punitive. Challenging and undoing that mindset, going against policies

even, I caught a lot of flak for that [SL2].

School Leader 2 also said, "there are people around you with a different philosophy that

may need to be undone or changed [SL2]." Furthermore, School Leader 2 also said that

she had to help them in moving from black and white to gray to see that every child is

unique. People who are in those disciplinarian systems can be black and white, and it's

difficult to get them to get on board and see the gray [SL2].

School leader 4 said, "a lot of people think that just because they're in special

education, they'll cause more problems [SL4]." This idea relates to what school Leader 3

said about the challenges of this disposition:

> One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands it. They
>
> think it's not fair. They think why do we have to have these kids in our room and
>
> disrupt their learning? But those students also need to learn and access the general
>
> curriculum and their peers. There are some people who have deep-rooted
>
> mindsets that don't allow for an inclusive setting [SL3].

Finally, School Leaders 1 and 3 wrap up why changing these dispositions in others is

important:

> [Inclusive practices] are important and people don't want to deal with it or push it
>
> aside, but as a parent, I would want my child included no matter what. I am a big
>
> believer in inclusion; I don't believe in separating students [SL1].

School Leader 3 said, "you must have transparent, honest conversations about what

[inclusivity] looks like. Not just me but a group, a team. The team is different from just

me, and I need those perspectives [SL3]."

Some school leaders' dispositions about the importance of relationship building came to light through interviews. School Leader 5 said, "I think that developing a relationship with students is of the utmost importance. It starts with relationships. The relationship covers everything. Start with the heart and build that relationship, and you will be able to manage more effectively [SL5]." School Leader 1 said,

> Getting to see them grow is a joy. [Student] was in 6th grade and would scream up and down the hallways and was out of control. By 8th grade, he was able to function in the classrooms. It was great seeing him grow and be able to see his worth [SL1].

Finally, some school leaders discussed how their dispositions led them to make a change. School Leader 5 said, "the co-sponsor and I noticed there was a certain group of students who struggled academically and behaviorally and thought together about how we could meet their needs. We looked at their behavior reports and observed [SL5]." School Leader 2 said,

> I was distraught and could not sleep for weeks. I could not stand that we got rid of this kid. I asked everyone I could; I knew this was the wrong thing to do, but I did it anyway because I was forced. So, at this moment, I made it my business to change what the policy was and that schools shouldn't have to follow it explicitly [SL2].

A vision statement from a large suburban school district includes the following language: We aspire to engage, communicate, and provide guidance to families to support students' academic, social, and behavioral success in our schools. We also aspire to provide an inclusive environment for all students. Aspiring to achieve is a disposition.

This aspirational vision supported action through a district wide grant supported initiative which included the following priority: To have a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for families and staff. The following action steps guided the work to create a more inclusive school district: welcome, engage, and include families: 1) expand opportunities for families to participate in school and system governance, 2) publish resources and provide training that enables parents to support their students in developing academic and social-emotional skills.

Dispositions are formed through knowledge and utilizing one's skills as a leader of an effective inclusive school. One overarching disposition that anyone working with students must have is a belief that every student is important, and every kid should be given the opportunity to learn and be successful every day they are in school. They also must model their expectations of the culture and climate of their school by treating all stakeholders with the same kind of care and kindness that they expect their staff to. By modeling, it becomes easier to have tough conversations with those who are not embodying those same dispositions. This also involves supporting stakeholders in understanding the why behind some things and the importance therein. Not only is relationship building a skill that needs to be held, but a disposition, as well.

How School Leaders Learn

Seven overarching concepts or themes are developed; the themes serve to contextualize and generalize the nature of learning to an inclusive leader. These themes are (1) Building Interpersonal Relationships, (2) Caring, (3) Responding in the Moment, (4) Sensing the Mood of Groups, (5) Adopting a Growth Mindset, (6) Establishing a

Positive School Culture, (7) Inclusive Leadership, and (8) Self-Reflection and Personal Development.

Learning Through Building Interpersonal Relationships

> School leaders build relationships with students. School leader 1 said,
>
> Getting to see them grow is a joy. [Student] was in 6th grade and would scream up and down the hallways and was out of control. By 8th grade, he was able to function in the classrooms. It was great seeing him grow and be able to see his worth [SL1].

School Leader one was able to build this relationship by "Being patient, researching, and understanding kids. Really learning not only about their disability but also their home life and getting to know kids beyond their disability - who are you, and what do you enjoy? [SL1]" School leader 5 said, "I think that developing a relationship with students is of the utmost importance. It starts with relationships. The relationship covers everything. Start with the heart and build that relationship, and you will be able to manage more effectively [SL5]." School leader 5 also said, "I appreciate this, too, about being an educator because we have the supportive administration who allow you to implement those things our students need [SL5]." School leader 5 went on to say, "I was building a relationship with her and putting different strategies into place to accommodate her and to help address those emotional and mental needs of the student [SL5]."

> School leaders build relationships with their staff. School Leader 3 said, "I need

to have the buy-in so we can work toward a shared mission and vision and align those to that [SL3]."

School leaders build relationships with all stakeholders. School leader 2 said, "you have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others, bringing people together and forming relationships and modeling [SL2]." School leader 3 said, "not just the team, but the parents and all of the stakeholders working together. What is the goal, and how can we get all kids moving? [SL3]." School leader 5 said, "some of the joys are coming across individuals from different backgrounds and it makes you a more well-rounded person and opportunities to grow and learn [SL5]."

Building interpersonal relationships helps the school leader feel more invested in them as a person, which will support the care, tenacity, and understanding it takes to support them as a school leader. Through building relationships, trust is attained, which will lead to all stakeholders buying into the mission and vision of the school.

Learning Through Caring

School leaders show they care by asking themselves, as School Leader 2 says, "How am I making sure students and teachers are feeling welcome? [SL2]" School Leader 3 said to be caring, you "must be tenacious - not letting anything let you give up on that kid [SL3]." Also, "you have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others, bringing people together and forming relationships and modeling [SL2]." To keep up that tenacity, School Leader 5 said, "It takes a love of education and students in order to be successful [SL5]." Furthermore, School Leader 2 stated:

It takes a lot of work to look at the whole child. Like using restorative practices instead of blanket punishments. It's easier to say let's write this kid off than working with the kid and the family and trying to do something different [SL2].

Being caring is about doing anything you can to support your stakeholders; as School Leader 2 describes, "this drove me to find alternate means in dealing with behavior and really being an advocate for the children and the families [SL2]." School Leader 2 explained that this might look like "challenging and undoing that mindset, going against policies even; I caught a lot of flak for that - I worked hard to show people in leadership and administrative positions that we are going to do things a different way [SL2]." Finally, showing that you care is about understanding that "every student counts. Every student matters [SL4]."

When school leaders show others they care, it also supports building interpersonal relationships. Leaders show that they are caring by leading from the heart and touching the hearts of those who they support. It also means that when stakeholders, and students particularly, have a situation, leaders will do anything they can to support them through it.

Learning Through Responding in the Moment

School leaders respond in the moment to many different situations every day. Examples from school leaders will also show that not responding in stressful situations is an aspect of this theme. School Leader 5's statement that "it takes innovation, quick thinking, the understanding that everything may not go according to plan and that that is ok [SL5]" embodies this theme. Another statement related to this theme is from School Leader 3, who says, "We also have to remember that just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today [SL3]." This is related to when School Leader 1 said, "when I changed that, it was a struggle for me, and the kids and I was trying to figure out why it was so difficult. It was a change for them to be with other kids again

[SL1]." School Leader 2 also responds to her staff regarding their everyday conversations to and about students by saying,

> One of the hardest things or biggest challenges is reframing the language that's used in schools. Helping people see that we need to speak about children in a better way and having to undo habits that people don't even realize they have [SL2].

This doesn't only happen within the schools, but also with district leadership. School leader one explained:

> With district leadership, there were times I had to push to have my kids get what they needed. I had to fight for things to ensure that my kids got what the other kids in the district got and that they were allowed to do things [SL1].

Another part of this, as I stated previously, is that not responding in the moment is sometimes more important than responding. School leader one explains this idea by saying "the biggest things were stopping and not letting my emotions get ahead of me when I was getting cursed out and finding out the why of them based on their disabilities [SL1]." Not only did she have to learn this, she also "had to train teachers to not take it so personally. I had to have one on one conversations with teachers to help them understand the why behind the behaviors and to not hold grudges. It's a new day every day. [SL1]"

Finally, some school leaders made statements that showed that there were incidents that caused them to respond in the moment. For example, School Leader 2 said, "I knew we had to do something differently [SL2]." School Leader 5 said, "This was pivotal to me because it was such an extreme case. We had to do things that were unorthodox [SL5]." School Leader 2 said, "This drove me to find alternate means in

dealing with behavior and really being an advocate for the children and the families [SL2]."

School leaders respond in the moment many times every day. No day looks the same in the life of an administrator. Responding in the moment may look like quick thinking to solve minor issues, or trying something new for another issue that doesn't seem to be working. Similarly, not responding in the moment is also connected. Sometimes, responding in the moment can cause leaders to react in a way that doesn't align with the school goals, and stepping back and reflecting before responding is also important.

Learning Through Sensing the Mood of Groups

School leaders need to be able to sense the moods of groups to know in which direction their leadership should go to improve teaching and learning strategies at their schools. School Leader 3 says that "being able to have conversations with people in honest ways and learning from those perspectives is what I like the most [SL3]" about being a leader in an inclusive setting. She goes on to say that "we may not always agree but we can come to some agreement for how this can work for kids [SL3]." School Leader 4 said, "a lot of people think that just because they're in special education they'll cause more problems [SL4]." This rings true through School Leader 3's statement:

> One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands it. They think it's not fair. They think why do we have to have these kids in our room and disrupt their learning? But those students also need to learn and access the general curriculum and their peers. There are some people who have deep-rooted mindsets that don't allow for an inclusive setting [SL3].

School Leaders 2 and 3 also added to this theme by saying "there are people around you with a different philosophy that may need to be undone or changed [SL2]" and "mindsets, beliefs, territorial kinds of things and having those difficult conversations [SL3]." However, no matter these differences, the mood needs to be understood because "the team is different from just me and I need those perspectives [SL3].

School leaders need to know what their stakeholders feel about what is going on in their schools or about certain situations. A big part of this found through interviews was surrounded around the idea of the mindset of the staff at the school regarding students and teaching and learning practices, particularly inclusive teaching and learning strategies. School leaders also need to use the perspectives of their stakeholders to make decisions.

Learning Through a Growth Mindset

School leaders don't just show up on the first day of school as successful leaders; leaders are built by several different means. School Leader 5 embodies the idea that leaders should also be life-long learners when she said, "I want to look at each experience and every as a learning experience and a time to grow [SL5]." She went on to explain that "some of the joys are coming across individuals from different backgrounds, and it makes you a more well-rounded person and opportunities to grow and learn [SL5]." All school leaders discussed their development as on-the-job learning and that their leadership preparation programs led them to understand "leadership theoretically [SL4]," but both School Leaders 1 and 3 developed their leadership skills by "trial by fire. Being thrown in the middle of it [SL1]" and "trial by fire. On-the-job training, making mistakes, and having those moments where you see that didn't work well, so what do I need to do

[SL3]?" School Leader 1 "learned the most when I became a principal. We don't train teachers or principals for what we deal with [SL1]." School Leader 3 learned from "mentors that I looked at and who were successful, inclusive, and fair. They took me under their wing to learn those skills. You must learn some skills, and some you have to unlearn [SL3]." School Leader 1 "also worked with the special education department to learn there. Once we talked about those kids, the teachers were able to better handle those situations [SL1]." Part of leadership development is also understanding that "just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today [SL3]." Finally, leaders are developed by leaders who take particular care in supporting teachers to find their leadership strengths (Sezgin et al., 2020) School Leader 5 lived this and explained:

> I used to say I'm just a teacher, but recently I've learned that I am a leader. I have
> to be innovative, build relationships, mediate, and come up with solutions, etc.
> being an educator has led me to have a way to come up with ideas and share those
> with other educators. I look for areas that may have a need that needs to be met,
> and I try to find ways to address those needs, and coming up with ideas has
> prepared me for those [SL5].

School leaders develop themselves as leaders in many ways. Some of these include being thrown into the work as a new administrator, theoretical knowledge through leadership development programs, mentors who supported the development of the leader and using the knowledge and expertise of those around them in the district.

Learning Through Establishing a Positive School Culture

School leaders directly impact the climate and culture of the school. School leader 1 said,

The intentionality and consistency you must have; you have to think about every

action you have that you're showing in that school because it affects the school.

They're modeling your behavior whether you believe it or not. The leader directly

controls the culture and climate. So even when I didn't want to be peppy and

inclusive etc. I had to put it on my face anyway [SL2].

School leader 2 asks herself the question, "how am I making sure students and teachers

are feeling welcome? [SL2]" She makes "making the environment where people want to

make it more fun to do the job because you have happy people, who want to be there,

smiling and laughing when they walk in [SL2] a priority and understands:

One of the hardest things or biggest challenges is reframing the language that's

used in schools. Helping people see that we need to speak about children in a

better way and having to undo habits that people don't even realize they have

[SL2].

School Leader 5 knows that the administrators in the building are the thermostat

of the building and says, "I appreciate this, too, about being an educator because we have

the supportive administration who allow you to implement those things our students need

[SL5]." Finally, establishing a positive school culture comes from every staff member

believing that "every student counts. Every student matters [SL4]."

Establishing a positive school culture of the school should be of top priority at any

school. Without happy teachers, staff, and students, none of the other important work will

get done. The leader directly affects the culture and climate of the school, and their action

or inaction speaks volumes to the staff about where the priorities of the school lie.

Teachers model for students, and school leaders model for teachers. They will emulate what is modeled for them.

Learning Through Intentional Focus on Inclusivity

Inclusivity takes work, and school leaders must intentionally build a sense of community within their schools that supports their inclusive leadership. School Leader 2 prefaced their remarks about inclusive leadership, saying, "it's better than being a school leader in a non-inclusive setting [SL2]." Some leaders discuss what it looks like to be inclusive. School Leader 3 said, "to work in an inclusive setting, you have to have a voice and allow people to have a voice to discuss concerns and issues and so things are working, so everyone is on the same page [SL3]." School Leader 2 said, "it takes a special kind of intentionality to be inclusive [SL2]." School Leader 3 said, "inclusivity includes everyone: kids, staff, and parents [SL3]." School Leader 1 said, "being patient, researching, and understanding kids. Really learning not only about their disability but also their home life and getting to know kids beyond their disability - who are you and what do you enjoy? [SL1]" Furthermore, "you have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others; bringing people together and forming relationships and modeling [SL2]." To be an effective leader in an inclusive setting, there are challenges that will need to be overcome. School leader 3 begins talking about these by saying,

One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands it. They think it's not fair. They think why do we have to have these kids in our room and disrupt their learning? But those students also need to learn and access the general curriculum and their peers. There are some people who have deep-rooted mindsets that don't allow for an inclusive setting [SL3]. School Leader 1 remembers taking on these challenges

when she became a principal. She says, "When I first came here, it was not inclusive. A lot of kids hadn't been in regular classes in years [SL1]." To help change this, one thing School Leader 2 did was "remind them and call teachers in or immediately tell them why we speak in a certain way or use a certain language that's conducive to the inclusivity [SL2]." School Leader 2 had a similar experience and said, "challenging and undoing that mindset, going against policies even, I caught a lot of flak for that - I worked hard to show people in leadership and administrative positions that we are going to do things a different way. [SL2]." Likewise, "there are people around you with a different philosophy that may need to be undone or changed [SL2]," which can also be a positive thing according to School Leader 3, who said, "being able to have conversations with people in honest ways and learning from those perspectives is what I like the most [SL3]." All of this is to say that [Inclusive practices] are important, and people don't want to deal with it or push it aside, but as a parent, I would want my child included no matter what. I am a big believer in inclusion. I don't believe in separating students [SL1] and "every student counts. Every student matters [SL4]."

Inclusive leadership is a non-negotiable in today's schools, and leaders love being a part of the inclusive leadership work. Being an inclusive leader means listening to and including all stakeholders in the conversations about both individual students and the school. It also means that leaders put in extra time to understand each individual student and how to best support them. Finally, incorporating differing perspectives, as with sensing the mood of groups, is important in inclusive leadership practices.

Learning Through Self-Reflection and Personal Development

Inclusive leaders learn through self-reflection and personal development. School Leader 2 embodied this theme when she said, "I love to learn and be filled with all of the knowledge. [SL2]" Of course, with learning also comes unlearning, or relearning things; as School Leader 3 says, "You have to learn some skills and some you have to unlearn. [SL3]" School Leader 2 continued discussing how she is self-reflective by saying, "You must think about every action you have that you're showing in that school because it affects the school. [SL2]" School Leader 3 described that while leading schools, this looks like "on-the-job training, making mistakes and having those moments where you see that didn't work well and asking, what do I need to do? [SL3]" School Leaders need to be reflective in a myriad of ways, including school climate and culture; as School Leader 2 says, she asks herself: "How am I making sure students and teachers are feeling welcome? [SL2]" School Leaders also need to support teachers in being self-reflective and developing their personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions. School Leader 1 described personal development as "learning how to deal with the behaviors and understanding where it came from was a huge learning curve for me and the teachers. [SL1]" School Leader 4 supports teachers by asking them to reflect on their practice through the following questions: "How are you meeting the needs of these students? How are you differentiating? How do you plan for struggles? [SL4]" Being self-reflective can be difficult. School Leader 5, after describing a difficult incident with a parent that,

It was disheartening and discouraging for me, but it was something that taught me resilience and was a prime example of how I could carry myself with poise

moving forward and that I needed to put forth all efforts for students and parents

to know we were all working together. [SL5]

School Leaders remember moments that were pivotal for their personal

development that was brought forth by being self-reflective. School Leader 1 said, "The

biggest things were stopping and not letting my emotions get ahead of me. [SL1]" School

Leader 2 said, "so at this moment, I made it my business to change what the policy was

and that schools shouldn't have to follow it explicitly [SL2]" and "seeing that made me

realize we needed to do things differently. [SL2]" School Leader 2 said, "For me, I

learned how to be flexible and have a more open mind about some of these things. [SL3]"

Finally, School Leader 5 said, "Although it was not a pleasurable experience, it really

brought about change. [SL5]"

Without being self-reflective and developing themselves personally, school

leaders would never grow change for the betterment of their stakeholders; they would be

stuck in the same place from their first day to their last. From the interview data, school

leaders are self-reflective and want to receive all of the knowledge they can in order to be

successful. They understand that their action or inaction is seen by and modeled by their

students and staff, so being self-reflective on how that is going is essential. School

leaders also support teachers in being self-reflective. Finally, once being self-reflective

helps to make a positive impact on the teaching and learning in the school leader's

school, that moment or critical incident is embedded into their minds as an important

point in their professional lives.

Two categories of critical incidents became evident through the case study: acute,

which is limited in duration and is solved rather quickly, and chronic, which is longer in

duration and generally affects multiple people with more complex solutions. School leaders described critical incidents that they experienced in both categories. Through the interviews, the types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that school leaders need to lead inclusive schools effectively were found. School leaders learned through leadership preparation programs, mentorship relationships, and critical incidents or being thrown into the work. There are many skills that leaders must have, learn to have, or unlearn to be effective leaders in an inclusive school. The disposition of the school leader will impact the dispositions of their stakeholders, so having appropriate dispositions are important. Finally, the results of the interviews uncovered seven themes: building interpersonal relationships, caring, responding in the moment, sensing the mood of groups, leadership development, establishing a positive school culture, inclusive leadership, and self-reflection and personal development. In Chapter 5, these ideas will be connected to the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential for leaders within inclusive settings and to determine how inclusive leaders develop essential leadership skills. The learning of specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions is contextualized in Chapter 4 and summarized in Appendices C through F. Overarching categories of knowledge, skills, and dispositions include: (1) learning to develop, leverage, and value interpersonal and community relationships, (2) leading and learning through valuing and demonstrating caring, (3) leading and learning through intentionally responding to critical incidents, both acute and chronic, and (4) leading and learning through self-reflection and personal development.

Through experiencing critical incidents, leaders learn to leverage existing interpersonal relationships and seek new interpersonal relationships (see Appendix C). Inclusive leaders build relationships with students, staff, and all stakeholders. Building relationships helps school leaders to better understand those they are supporting and to better understand themselves as individuals and as leaders. It is important to develop relationships with an array of constituents and to consider their experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs. Through strong interpersonal relationships, inclusive leaders work to establish an educational culture in which failures are seen as learning opportunities to build relationships and make practical decisions (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021).

inclusive school leaders are much more effective when they develop, foster, and maintain positive, heart-felt relationships with all stakeholders.

Inclusive leaders learn through caring (see Appendix D): School leaders learn through caring about their students, faculty and staff, and stakeholders. They demonstrate a love of education and caring for students through self-reflection, tenacity, and relationship building.

Through intentionally responding to critical incidents (see Appendix E), both acute and chronic, Inclusive leaders learn by responding in real-time to the complexities of leading inclusive schools. Being quick thinking and making many decisions throughout the school day is a skill that school leaders need to have or learn very soon in their careers. Responding in the moment also means that if your decision or strategy that was implemented isn't working, you must try something else until something does work. There are situations where immediate intervention and new learning should take place. To be able to respond in the moment effectively, school leaders should be well-balanced and well-adjusted, temperate, conscientious, hard-working and enthusiastic, compassionate, tolerant and empathetic, and be able to see the big picture and the details simultaneously, and self-aware and have the ability to self-regulate (Mander, 2008).

Effective School leaders constantly evaluate their practice and understand the changing dynamic in schools. They can be innovative, quick thinking, and have a willingness to adapt and make changes. Not responding in the moment is sometimes more important than responding. Effective school leaders often are faced with highly emotional conflicts involving students, parents, and other stakeholders. They must be

able to understand these emotional behaviors, respond in a manner that does not escalate the conflict, and model this type of response to their teachers.

Inclusive leaders learn through self-reflection and personal development (see Appendix F). The ability to build, foster, and maintain positive interpersonal and community relationships, and respond to Acute and Chronic Critical Incidents are learned skills. Effective inclusive school leaders self-reflect on both positive and negative encounters from multiple perspectives to continually improve their practice. Effective Inclusive leaders are intentional and consistent on all matters that affect the school.

The study yielded scant or no evidence to support current trends in education, including data-informed decision-making, formalized evaluation of teachers or leaders, testing, standards-based curriculum, research-based pedagogical approaches, formalized professional development practices, assertive discipline practices, formalized no-exceptions rules, or high-stakes externally driven initiatives such as school performance scores and school report cards. Indeed, the findings tend to contraindicate the efficacy of such practices. Inclusive leaders dismissed their learning through graduate school courses and degrees as being theoretical and not preparing them for the realities of leading inclusive schools. Because the focus of the current study was inclusive leadership, it could be the case that leaders find the trends to have value, but they don't associate the value with inclusive leadership: more needs to be known about this. Public schools will continue to become more diverse (Boroson, 2017; Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). To provide equitable education for all students, all school leaders must become inclusive leaders. The study demonstrates that leaders believe that they are, to a great extent, left to

their own resources to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective leaders in inclusive schools.

Inclusive leaders describe their development as on-the-job learning. Leaders believe that leadership programs give them a theoretical understanding of leadership but fail to teach the pragmatic knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to leading inclusive schools. Teaching and leading teaching and learning is dynamic and constantly changing. It relies heavily interpersonal relationships and responding to critical incidents; these skills are not easily taught in a training program. Many in these positions receive their training on the job, through trial and error, and through self-evaluation and personal development.

Inclusive leaders seek out mentors for themselves and create situations where they can serve as mentors for others. Inclusive leaders search out mentors that have been successful in leading fairly and ethically in an inclusive setting. Effective inclusive leaders act both as mentors and role models when working students and situations that are unique to an inclusive classroom. Finally, leaders are developed by leaders who take particular care in supporting teachers to find their leadership strength.

Inclusive leaders build an inclusive educational culture by defining and organizing the school around inclusive education, building the capacity of faculty, understanding the context, supporting, and communicating with family, understanding how inclusion affects students, and providing professional growth opportunities. (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Shogren et al., 2015). Leading through the lens of inclusivity requires leaders to be intentional about every action and interaction when working with all types of stakeholders. Critical aspects of intentionality are caring about

others and building relationships with them. Inclusive leaders allow everyone to have a voice and help them to realize that their voices matter.

Effective inclusive school leaders utilize interpersonal and community relationships to ensure that all stakeholders are intentionally allowed a safe space to voice concerns and discuss issues. Developing this trust with stakeholders is an intentional commitment that requires caring, patience, sensitivity, cultural awareness, and research. It requires a commitment to understanding the whole child and seeing beyond their disability.

To be an effective leader in an inclusive setting, there are challenges that will need to be overcome. One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands inclusivity. Some think it is not fair and is disruptive to other students. Another challenge are deep rooted philosophies or mindsets about disabilities, special education, and inclusive education. These mindsets are not limited to one specific group of stakeholders and may include educators in leadership and administrative roles. It is the responsibility of the inclusive leader to challenge, undo, and provide professional development opportunities to eliminate these stagnate mindsets and work toward replacing them with a growth mindset that leads to a deeper understanding and belief of a more inclusive school.

Understanding the perspectives, values, and beliefs of students, staff, parents, or other stakeholders is important to know where to spend your time supporting your school as an inclusive leader. Inclusive leaders must first learn deeply about their followers before they can lead them to understand the values, mission, vision, etc., that the school has to support a positive, inclusive environment at the school and in the community.

Having high expectations concerning inclusive education and communicating those expectations to all stakeholders is essential (Sider et al., 2017).

Positive school culture is the most important aspect of having a successful school (Smith et al., 2020). School leaders who focus on collegiality among their staff tend to have a school culture that promotes a positive culture of learning for all (Sezgin et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2020). Teachers will feel this by having a school leader who makes them feel supported and valued as an educator. Smith et al. (2020) found that professional teacher behavior, how teachers behave toward students and staff, and having and maintaining high expectations for all students, are directly and significantly impacted by principal influence. The most important factor in having a school that runs well and meets its goals, is productive and organized, and encourages high expectations for all students, is to have a positive school culture. When all stakeholders believe that 'every student counts and every student matters no matter what, a positive school culture has been established.

School leaders are the key to creating an inclusive school through their support of all stakeholders (Sider et al., 2017). School leaders build an inclusive school culture in their schools by collaborating and building positive relationships, leading with encouragement, being actively involved in supporting teachers, having a growth mindset, and facing conflicts with a positive attitude (Osiname, 2016).

Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice from this research. First, both school districts and leadership development programs should use these results, or potentially use my survey, to identify areas of practice where leaders' learning is focused on learning

through critical incidents. If districts and leadership preparation programs do this, they will be able to find ways to have similar learning embedded into their programs and professional development. The learning would be much more meaningful to those involved because it would be individualized based on the present need and level of knowledge and expertise.

Next, school leaders should understand the implications of critical incidents in relation to their own work as inclusive leaders. School leaders are more self-reflexive in their own practice, so they are more aware of the need to make changes, especially changes that are needed in the culture of learning. This idea of critical incidents and how they affect our actions would support the practices that are already being done through an intentional lens of asking oneself how this situation can help me to improve the quality of educational care received at my school.

Finally, because significant learning occurred for leaders who placed themselves in non-school settings, such as attending church services in the community of the schools they served, leaders themselves and districts can develop additional experiential learning situations and then facilitate those with the leaders processing the implications of those experiences

Implications for Future Research

More still needs to be known about how critical incidents affect school leaders' day-to-day work in their school. Additional case studies should be conducted in a variety of different school contexts to better understand how both acute and chronic incidents affect changes in practice and how school leaders lead inclusive schools.

There should be further research to understand how leaders can effectively share their professional learning with others through mentor relationships, professional presentations, blogging, and other forms of publication.

Another recommendation is to analyze current leadership standards and leadership preparation programs and compare the content of those programs with the kinds of learning for which school leaders most heavily rely upon, which were identified through the current study, to identify additional strategies that can be used to strengthen the teaching of those competencies.

Finally, future research could expand the scope of this study to look at how educational leaders at other levels, such as district or state leaders, learned to be effective school leaders through experiencing critical incidents, mentorship and other means.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale
		VL *VM*
S1 School leaders use data from a variety of sources to support teachers in their teaching and learning practices with inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q1 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S2 School leaders follow safety regulations to keep their campuses safe for all students, including students with disabilities.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q2 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S3 School leaders advocate for all stakeholders to hold high expectations for diverse learners, in which all students have access to equitable and appropriate learning opportunities.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q3 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S4 School leaders use data from a variety of sources to support inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q4 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S5 School leaders lead teachers in professional growth that supports the appropriate use of accommodations for inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale	
		VL	*VM*
Q5 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S6 School leaders use voices from a diverse stakeholder population to create their vision, mission, and goals for their school.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q6 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S7 School leaders support teachers in appropriately and effectively implementing curriculum, including providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q7 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S8 School leaders communicate and act equitably with all stakeholders.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q8 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S9 School leaders use data, research, and best practices to support teaching and learning related to inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q9 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale VL VM
S10 School leaders lead teachers in professional development that supports their instruction with inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q10 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S11 School leaders have high expectations for current and potential teachers and work to keep high quality personnel, especially those who work well with inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q11 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S12 School leaders evaluate objectively, keeping student learning and best interests in mind.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q12 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S13 School leaders provide collaboration and professional development that supports teaching and learning, identification, and placement of students with disabilities.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q13 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S14 School leaders support teachers in reflecting on their own values and beliefs as they relate to the school's vision and goals for teaching in inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale
		VL *VM*
Q14 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S15 School leaders monitor progress of students with disabilities and support teachers in understanding up-to-date educational policies and procedures related to teaching inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q15 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S16 School leaders ensure that students with disabilities receive equipment and technologies that will support their learning in the inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q16 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S17 School leaders advocate for inclusive classrooms through high expectations, equity, openness, caring, and trust.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q17 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S18 School leaders collaborate with stakeholders with conflicting perspectives about education to build a rapport and ultimately become positive supports for the school.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q18 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale
		VL *VM*
S19 School leaders use their school vision, mission, and goals in order to implement programs and services to support inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q19 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S20 School leaders use feedback to support teachers in teaching and learning practices that are culturally responsive.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q20 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S21 School leaders involve families in the decision-making process.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q21 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S22 School leaders collaborate with community stakeholders to support the teaching and learning of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q22 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S23 School leaders use progress monitoring systems that provide meaningful data	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale
		VL *VM*
Q23 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S24 School leaders are abreast of current strategies, research, and technologies that will support inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q24 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S25 School leaders evaluate and apply evidence-based practices for engaging all stakeholders in upholding the vision, mission, and goals of the school.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q25 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S26 School leaders are ethical and fair, practicing integrity and justice through their conduct, relationships, decision making, and supervision of resources to support inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q26 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S27 School leaders create instructional teams to analyze student work and progress to develop strategies to support teachers and students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q27 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale
		VL *VM*
S28 School leaders use a variety of student data to support and improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q28 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S29 School leaders stay abreast to current research regarding teaching and learning strategies for inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q29 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S30 School leaders use teacher accountability measures to improve the teaching and learning practices for inclusive classrooms.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q30 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S31 School leaders connect their families to community agencies to support the whole child.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Q31 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
S32 School leaders respect diversity by learning about their communities.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Statements / Questions		Form of Learning	Likert Scale	
			VL	*VM*
Q32	Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S33	School leaders understand and adhere to educational policies and support inclusive classrooms ethically.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q33	Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S34	School leaders effectively manage financials and use funds to support teaching and learning in their schools.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q34	Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S35	School leaders celebrate diversity and use it to strengthen their current practices.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q35	Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
S36	School leaders help community stakeholders understand the vision and goals for their inclusive schools.	Critical Incidents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		In-Service PD Through School District	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Q36	Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
		Mentorship Relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	

Statements / Questions	Form of Learning	Likert Scale						
		VL						*VM*
S37 School leaders collaborate with community programs and develop and implement policies, processes, and procedures to support students with disabilities.	Critical Incidents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	In-Service PD Through School District	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q37 Please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being very little and 7 being very much, how each of the following forms of learning impacted your learning of this statement.	Leadership Preparation Program	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Mentorship Relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX B

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND DISPOSITIONS DATA TABLE

Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of School Leaders

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Learning how to deal with the behaviors and understanding where it came from was a huge learning curve for me and the teachers. There were reasons behind them. We just needed to figure those out. [SL1]	It takes a special kind of intentionality to be inclusive. [SL1]	Getting to see them grow is a joy. [Student] was in 6th grade and would scream up and down the hallways and was out of control. By 8th grade he was able to function in the classrooms. It was great seeing him grow and be able to see his worth. [SL1]
It takes a lot of work to look at the whole child; restorative practices; instead of blanket punishments. It's easier to say let's write this kid off than actually working with the kid and the family and trying to do something different. [SL2]	Making the environment where people want to be makes it more fun to do the job because you have happy people, who want to be there, smiling and laughing when they walk in. That's how you know you have it established. A good climate and culture are those benefits.[SL2]	Making the environment where people want to be makes it more fun to do the job because you have happy people, who want to be there, smiling and laughing when they walk in. That's how you know you have it established. A good climate and culture are those benefits. [SL2]
Not just the team, but the parents and all of the stakeholders working together. What is the goal and how can we get all kids moving? Inclusivity includes everyone: kids, staff, and parents. [SL3]	I worked hard to show people in leadership and administrative positions that we are going to do things a different way. [SL2]	It was hard going against that when it comes to punishment and punitive action. They think this is the way I was raised; spanking or consequences for everything; harsh or punitive. Challenging and undoing that mindset, going against policies even, I caught a lot of flack for that. [SL2]
I want to look at each experience as a learning experience and a time to grow. [SL5]	Must be tenacious - not letting anything let you give up on that kid. [SL2]	There are people around you with a different philosophy that may need to be undone or changed. [SL2]
Some of the joys are coming across individuals from different backgrounds and it makes you a more well-rounded person and opportunities to grow and learn. [SL5]	To work in an inclusive setting you have to have a voice and allow people to have a voice to discuss concerns and issues and so things are working so everyone is on the same page. [SL3]	I had to help them in moving from the black and white to the gray to see that every child is unique. People who are in those disciplinarian systems can be black and white and it's difficult to get them to get on board and see the gray. [SL2]

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
You have different experiences on a day to day basis based on discussion in the classroom and I love that I get to know people from all different backgrounds, have in depth conversations and address concerns that students may have and open that up to everyone else. [SL5]	Being able to have conversations with people in honest ways and learning from those perspectives is what I like the most. [SL3]	I need to have the buy-in so we can work toward a shared mission and vision and align those to that. We may not always agree but we can come to some agreement for how this can work for kids.[SL3]
You don't always know what to do and you feel like you fall short. [SL5]	It takes a love of education and students in order to be successful. [SL5]	You have to have transparent honest conversations about what [inclusivity] looks like. Not just me but a group; a team. The team is different from just me and I need those perspectives.[SL3]
I learned the most when I became a principal. We don't train teachers or principals for what we deal with. [SL1]	It takes innovation, quick thinking, the understanding that everything may not go according to plan and that that is OK. [SL5]	One of the biggest challenges is that not everyone believes or understands it. They think it's not fair. They think why do we have to have these kids in our room and disrupt their learning? But, those students also need to learn and access the general curriculum and their peers. There are some people who have deep rooted mindsets that don't allow for an inclusive setting. [SL3]
I learned a lot through trial by fire and being thrown in the middle of it. [SL1]	You have to learn some skills and some you have to unlearn. [SL3]	A lot of people think that just because they're in special education they'll cause more problems.[SL4]
I learned how to be a school leader through trail by fire, on the job training, making mistakes and having those moments where you see that didn't work well what do I need to do. [SL3]	I have to be innovative, build relationships, mediate, and come up with solutions, etc. being an educator has led me to have ways to come up with ideas and share those with other educators. [SL5]	the co-sponsor and I noticed there was a certain group of students who struggled academically and behaviorally and thought together about how we could meet their needs. We looked at their behavior reports and observed. [SL5]

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
I also learned from mentors that I looked at and who were successful, inclusive, and fair. They took me under their wing to learn those skills. [SL3]	The biggest things were stopping and not letting my emotions get ahead of me when I was getting cursed out and finding out the why of them based on their disabilities. [SL1]	I was distraught and could not sleep for weeks. I could not stand that we got rid of this kid. I asked everyone I could; I knew this was the wrong thing to do but I did it anyway because I was forced. So at this moment I made it my business to change what the policy was and that schools shouldn't have to follow it explicitly. [SL2]
		Every student counts. Every student matters. [SL4]
I also worked with the special education department to learn there. [SL1]	I appreciate this too about being an educator because we have a supportive admin who allows you to implement the things our students need. [SL5]	The leader directly controls the culture and climate; so even when I didn't want to be peppy and inclusive etc. I had to put it on my face anyway. [SL2]
My Master's program allowed me to take the classes, so I understood leadership theoretically. [SL4]	I also had to train teachers to not take it so personally. I had to have one on one conversations with teachers to help them understand the why behind the behaviors and to not hold grudges. It's a new day every day. [SL1]	Mindsets, beliefs, territorial kinds of things and having those difficult conversations. [SL3]
When I was under [principal] as a teacher, they would build my capacity by saying, 'here's a learning moment for you when you move up' and asked what I would do in this situation. [SL4]	There were times I had to push to have my kids get what they needed. I had to fight for things to ensure that my kids got what the other kids in the district got and that they were allowed to do things. [SL1]	I think that developing a relationship with students is of the utmost importance. It starts with relationships. The relationship covers everything. Start with the heart and build that relationship and you will be able to manage more effectively. [SL5]
We have to be able to think through our processes and not punish students for things that are out of their control. [SL1]	This drove me to find alternate means in dealing with behavior and really being an advocate for the children and the families. [SL2]	[Inclusive practices] are important and people don't want to deal with it or push it aside but as a parent, I would want my child included no matter what. I am a big believer in inclusion; I don't believe in separating students. [SL1]
As a first time Assistant Principal of discipline, this was not my wheelhouse, and	The teachers were frustrated in not knowing how to teach students from a certain	

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
not where I found myself to be knowledgeable. At the time this was my weakest area; I didn't understand why teachers had discipline problems. [SL2]	demographic. I knew we had to do something differently. [SL2]	
We should have to look at the kids' intent and to teach kids that it wasn't the right thing to do. We don't teach behavior like we do other subjects, but we need it. [SL2]	The silver lining of these events include increasing tech skills and teachers looking at improving instructional practices. A lot of good things have come out of that. For me, I learned how to be flexible and have a more open mind about some of these things. [SL3]	
We went on a bus and we saw where the kids came from. We did education surrounding inequities and racial and Ruby Payne's work - understanding how different children learned. [SL2]	Numbers aren't everything. You have to do your job to show you're an effective teacher. To do that you have to meet their needs day in and day out. [SL4]	
I was invited to a church where a lot of our students and support staff attended. I went and was completely engrossed in it and it really informed me of the culture. I was sitting there for hours and everyone was standing up, hollering, shouting amen, etc. and were encouraged to get up, walk around, get up when they want, get up and go get a snack, etc. When I compared that to how we do school, I realized these kids are encouraged to do things one way at home and church, but the way we do school is the opposite: Don't get up, don't talk, and ask permission for everything; which is the opposite of how they are growing up - seeing that made me realize we needed to do things differently. Out of that	How are you meeting the needs of these students? How are you differentiating? How do you plan for struggles? [SL4]	

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
experience came a lot of work in collaborative learning and hands-on instruction. [SL2]		
COVID forced us to take a look at what we're doing and ask ourselves if it was working - some kids do better with technology and one-on-one. [SL3]	I had a situation with a parent who wanted to meet with me and the meeting did not go well at all. It was almost an interrogation. It was disheartening and discouraging for me but it was something that taught me resilience and was a prime example of how I could carry myself with poise moving forward and that I needed to put forth all efforts for students and parents to know we were all working together. [SL5]	
We also have to remember that just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today. [SL3]		
This year the problems with behaviors are more complex, more severe, and I'm trying to figure out how I can make an impact and help that. [SL3]	Being patient, researching, and understanding kids. [SL1]	
Really learning not only about their disability but also their home life and getting to know kids beyond their disability - asking them who you are and what do you enjoy. [SL1]	You have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others; bringing people together and forming relationships and modeling. [SL2]	
	The intentionality and consistency you have to have; you have to think about every action you have that you're showing in that school because it affects the school. They're modeling your behavior whether you believe it or not. [SL2]	

Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
	Being intentional about speaking to parents, getting yelled at and then building that relationship back up - they knew they could come to me and I would hear them and listen to them. [SL2]	
	Not feeling supported enough from district leadership. People come and talk and talk and talk but don't give you an actual solution to the problem. [SL4]	

APPENDIX C

LEADING AND LEARNING THROUGH BUILDING

INTERPERSONAL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Theme	Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Leading and learning through building Interpersonal and community Relationships	Learning about people with different backgrounds: Understanding misconceptions stakeholders hold about inclusive students: Expectations of teachers, students, parents, and district leaders: Understanding stakeholders' processes, mindsets, beliefs, and biases Understanding that developing a relationship with students is of the utmost importance. Understanding the culture of the communities you serve. Really learning not only about their disability but also their home life and getting to know kids beyond their disability	Communicating with district leaders Being able to have conversations with people in honest ways and learning from those perspectives. Being able to find agreement on mission and vision even though there are differences on how to achieve the mission and vision. You must have transparent, honest conversations about what [inclusivity] looks like. Learn through mentor relationships. Training teachers on how to respond emotionally. Being intentional about speaking to parents getting yelled at and then building that relationship back up.	Being appreciative of the support from district leaders they knew they could come to me, and I would hear them and listen to them.

APPENDIX D

LEADING AND LEARNING THROUGH CARING

Theme	Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Leading and Learning Through Caring	Understanding student concerns Start with the heart and build that relationship, and you will be able to manage more effectively.	To work in an inclusive setting, you have to have a voice and allow people to have a voice to discuss concerns and issues Being an advocate for children and families, Having difficult conversations, Being patient, researching and understanding kids	Experiencing personal satisfaction though seeing others grow Finding joy in celebrating diversity It takes a love of education and students in order to be successful. Believing inclusive practices are important. You have to be intentional about focusing on caring about others, bringing people together, and forming relationships, and modeling.

APPENDIX E

LEADING AND LEARNING THROUGH RESPONDING TO

ACUTE AND CHRONIC CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Theme	Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Leading and Learning through Responding to Acute and Chronic Critical Incidents	Understanding why students behave as they do Restorative practices The teachers were frustrated in not knowing how to teach students from a certain demographic. We should have looked at the kids' intent and taught kids that it wasn't the right thing to do. We don't teach behavior like we do other subjects, but we need it Numbers aren't everything. You have to do your job to show you're an effective teacher. To do that you have to meet their needs day in and day out. We also must remember that just because it worked yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work today.	Establishing a positive school climate Going against policy to do the right thing. Challenging existing mindsets, It takes innovation and quick thinking. Solve problems and share solutions. Motivating students Advocating for students Knowing when change needs to occur. Knowing what questions need to be asked Recognizing learning moments	You don't always know what to do, and you feel like you fall short. understanding that everything may not go according to plan and that that is OK

APPENDIX F

LEADING AND LEARNING THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION

AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Theme	Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions
Leading and Learning through Self-Reflection and Personal Development	Understanding that others' teaching and learning experiences are different from my own. Recognizing that as a leader, you need multiple perspectives to succeed. Experiencing firsthand the neighborhoods where your families live Understanding the culture of the communities you serve	Intentionality to be inclusive. Must be tenacious - not letting anything let you give up on that kid. Ability to learn and to unlearn. Recognize mistakes. not letting my emotions get ahead of me when I was getting cursed out. Putting on a good face Being flexible and having an open mind The intentionality and consistency you must have; you have to think about every action you have that you're showing in that school because it affects the school	Having fun at work Willingness to challenge existing mindsets and policies even though it involves personal, professional risk. Having resilience Maintaining poise

APPENDIX G

HUMAN USE EEMPTION LETTER

MEMORANDUM

TO: Alyson Perry (Student Researcher) and Dr. Lynne Stratton

FROM: Dr. Walter Buboltz, Professor/Elva L. Smith Endowed Professor
            buboltz@latech.edu

SUBJECT: Human Use Committee - Review DECISION

DATE: June 6, 2022

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

HUC No.:   **22-097**

TITLE: **How Critical Incidents Shape School Leader's Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions to Become More Effective Leaders in Inclusive Settings**

HUC DECISION: <u>**Exempt from full review**</u>

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):
It has been determined that your study meets the requirements for exemption **45 CFR §46.104(d) (2) (i):**

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), **survey procedures**, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **if at least one of the following criteria is met:**

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Additional comments from Reviewer:
The study uses published archival data, publicly available records, group observations, and interviews. Students are not involved in this study. Observations and interviews take place where no students are present, such as professional learning community meetings and grade-level meetings. The identity of participants is not part of the study. Care is taken to not record the identity of participants who communicate digitally. All information relating to this study is stored on a password-protected device. Informed consent is obtained from all participants. There is no intervention or physical contact with participants.

Thank you for submitting your Human Use Proposal to Louisiana Tech's Institutional Review Board.