

**PUBLIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEIVED
SELF-EFFICACY IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN AN
INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY STUDY**

By

Amber Jean Caproni

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Full inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education classroom has been a longstanding goal of many school districts within the United States. Many studies have been conducted to understand what attributes are needed for successful inclusion with the evidence pointing to the need for teachers to have a strong sense of instructional self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities. Copious research concerning teachers' experiences with inclusive education has been conducted across typical public-school settings; however, scant information is known about inclusive education experiences of general education teachers employed in vocational high schools. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that shape and/or affect the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The research questions were framed so as to discover what individual, environmental, and prior experiences are associated with general vocational education teachers' sense of self-efficacy in teaching students with disabilities in a vocational educational inclusive classroom setting. Criterion-based sampling was used to recruit between 10-15, with a minimum of 10, faculty members from a rural medium-sized technical school in western Massachusetts. Using the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group, the perceptions and experiences related to inclusion were collected, coded, and thematically analyzed using NVivo. From the data, four themes emerged: (a) successful inclusion, (b) prior experiences, (c) awareness and (d) school environment. Study findings may inform curriculum and best practices for teaching to inclusive vocational classrooms and guide professional development decisions regarding inclusive educational practices in vocational classrooms.

Keywords: teacher self-efficacy, inclusive education, vocational education, special education

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing family. When I began this doctoral journey, I did so to prove to my beautiful daughters that they can do anything they put their minds to; that no hurdle is too large, and no mountain is too high. Even though I struggled with finding balance in life, all that I needed to do to be alright was to look into the faces of my little girls, and their presence provided me strength and stamina to continue. Through this doctoral journey, I have grown as a scholar, a mother, a teacher, and as a wife. Not only has this process increased my academic knowledge and rigor, but it has also taught me life lessons that will impact my life forever. I thank my family greatly for their support and love to help me achieve amazing outcomes.

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List of Abbreviations

CTE –Career & Technical Education

FAPE –Free and Appropriate Public Education

IDEA -Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP –Individualized Education Program

ITP –Individual Transition Plan

LRE - Least Restrictive Environment

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter presents a framework for research investigating the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The first section presents a summary of the most relevant current literature on perceived barriers of inclusion and a historical, social, and theoretical background to the problem surrounding the successes or failures of inclusion within the vocational education classroom. The next section discusses the pragmatic paradigms of the researcher as it relates to the epistemological and axiological approaches used in this study. Chapter One continues with the problem and purpose statements explaining what the gap in knowledge/evidence is and what procedures will be implemented to recruit participants and collect and analyze those data. A discussion concerning the significance of this study and potential contributions to generalized knowledge is given, then will be followed by the research questions and key definitions used in this dissertation.

Background

Education began in the United States in 1642 when the first American public school was built in Dedham, Massachusetts (Galvin, 2018); however, education of students with disabilities did not begin until the 18th century when individuals with disabilities were educated in asylums. Horace Mann opposed these asylums, and said that as a country, the United States needed a common school to embrace all children (Florian, 2014), so he began the rise of early special education classes. Then, in the 1960s and the 1970s, an educational reform led to the question of civil rights and helped give rise to inclusive education (Florian, 2014).

Historical

Inclusion is a mainstream topic around the water cooler in any public education setting due to its complex nature and misunderstanding (Jenson, 2018). Inclusion is a philosophical ideology that derives from a social constructionist norm (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011). The ideology behind inclusion is that students with disabilities should be educated to greatest extent possible in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their general education peers. The postmodern inclusionist's idea of special education is that it is deemed as segregation and to alleviate this segregation of students with any type of disability, students need to all be educated in a general education classroom (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011).

From the ideals of the social constructionist movement, *full inclusion* is a term which expresses commitment to educate every child with a disability in a general setting, regardless of their disability condition (Jenson, 2018), and is seen as causing public educational facilities to fight for survival of federal funding through compliance of laws (Meir, 2018). There are differing views of inclusion. Some educators view inclusion for students with disabilities as occurring only in a general classroom without a continuum of placements (i.e., placement outside of the general classroom is “segregation”), with the belief that the general education teacher and the setting and its resources can address any and all instructional/social needs (Kauffman et al., 2005). The concept of full inclusion to this particular group entails bringing the support services to the child with disabilities in the general classroom setting, rather than placing the child elsewhere to receive those services. These support services could come in any form, including the use of a special education needs (SEN) educator (Eisenman et al., 2011).

On the other hand, some educators possess a “softer” view of inclusion as instruction in the general education setting with an “as needed” use of IDEA’s requirement for the availability

of a continuum of alternative placements (i.e., Sec. 300.115(a)(b)(1)(2)) when it is clear that the student is not making adequate progress on their individualized education program (IEP) goals (Calhoon et al., 2018; Kauffman et al., 2005; Kauffman et al., 2008). While a number of educators hold that inclusion involves/requires the incorporation of all children as active, fully participating members in a general class “community” (Roberts & Simpson, 2016), other educators complain that students with special needs are not given any other option except the general classroom. The frustration expressed by some educators led Tankersley et al. (2007) to remark that the observed outcome of inclusion is the reverse of the days (i.e., pre-EAHCA) in which the self-contained classroom was all that was available for students with disabilities

Despite the fact that disability has been recognized as a “natural human experience” (Maydosz & Maydosz, 2013, p. 65), and that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) now serves to protect and address students’ disabilities, the reality is that it has taken years to progress to this point in time. In November of 1975 President Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) or EHA. This law required all states that accepted money from the federal government to provide equal access, or free and appropriate public education (FAPE), to educate children with disabilities (Maydosz & Maydosz, 2013). Not even a year later in 1976, the EHA was amended by Public Law 99-457, which now mandated that all individual states needed to provide services to families of children, born with disabilities from the time they were born (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

In 1990, the EHA’s name changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and was amended to add autism and traumatic brain injury as new disability categories and mandated the inclusion of the individual transition plan (ITP) to the student’s IEP. Another major reauthorization occurred in 1997 when Congress reauthorized the IDEA to ensure (a)

students with disabilities had access to the same curriculum as their non-disabled peers, (b) the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide and districtwide assessments, (c) measurable IEP goals and objectives, and (e) functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans for students with emotional or behavioral needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The most recent authorization occurred in 2004 when Congress amended the IDEA by requiring early intervention for students, greater accountability and improved educational outcomes, and raised standards for instructors who teach special education (Maydosz & Maydosz, 2013).

The IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are two laws that have implications, governance and guidance for the education of children of disabilities. It is important to note that neither of these laws require or promote the political mandate of inclusion. In fact, special education pioneer and legal scholar, Barbara Bateman (cf., Bateman & Linden, 2006, 2012) indicated that “the practice urged by [proponents] of the inclusion of all children with disabilities in general education is blatantly illegal, violating both the letter and the spirit of IDEA” (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009, p. 179). These laws stress the preference for placing a student in the LRE to the maximum extent appropriate to their educational needs, stressing the important civil and moral right of students with disabilities to an effective instruction (Kauffman & Badar, 2014). The IDEA was enacted to assist states in meeting educational needs of students with disabilities via federal funding efforts (Yell, 2019). If a child is found eligible under one of the 13 categories of disabilities (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(a)), then they have the right to free and appropriate public education in conformity with their Individualized Education Program (IEP) (IDEA 20 U.S.C. sec 1401(18)(c)). Amended in 2004, IDEA now has four subchapters, and of these four parts, Part B contains the requirements that school personnel must be concerned with when developing programs for students that require special education (Yell, 2019, p.59). The

first portion of Part B of the IDEA declares that the state must assure all students with disabilities, from birth to 21, who require special education services or needs are identified, located, and evaluated (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. Sec 300.220). This zero-reject principle assures that all students with a disability are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Part B also mandates that students with disabilities are educated in a classroom with their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. Sec. 300.550 (b) (1)). This subchapter requires that children with disabilities be educated in the LRE to meet their educational needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). That means that students receiving special education services can only be removed to separate classes when the nature or severity of their disability is such that they cannot receive an appropriate education within the general classroom. To ensure that students are educated within the least restrictive environment, schools are to offer a continuum of alternative placements, such as regular classes, resource rooms, special classes, special schools, homebound instructions, and institutional instructions (Yell, 2019).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. This law protects any person who has a physical or mental impairment (Section 504 Regulations, 34 C.F.R 104.3 (j)). Therefore, this law provides a wider definition of disability than IDEA (Zirkel, 2020). According to Section 504, in addition to offering protection from discrimination, schools must make reasonable accommodations or modifications to programs and services to ensure that discrimination does not occur (Yell, 2019). Section 504 states that schools need to provide an appropriate education, and to follow a process to ensure equal access. Therefore, schools are required to educate

students with disabilities along with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. So, section 504 states that a child with a disability should be placed in the regular education environment unless it is proven to be ineffective (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Both the IDEA and Section 504 pertain to vocational schools. Vocational high schools have the primary goal of providing students with an occupation related education concentrating mostly on craft skills. The main aim of vocational and technical education, also known as a Career & Technical Education (CTE), is to provide the students with basic behaviors that will enable the individual to have an occupation which is recognized and accepted in the business world (Altan & Altintas, 2017). CTE is provided for and protected under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. This Act was first authorized by the federal government in 1984 and was reauthorized in 1998, 2000, 2006, and 2018 (Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, S.250-109). This act provides \$1.2 billion in federal support for CTE programs in all 50 states.

The first vocational school was built in Missouri in 1879 and combined hands-on learning with classroom learning (Kreissman & Strange, 2020), but was not technically labeled a trade school. The first trade school came about in 1881 in New York (Kreisman & Strange, 2020). This vocational school thrived with agricultural education. After the Second World War, a surge in career and technical education developed because technical skills were needed for defense purposes.

The surge in career and technical education led to many secondary public schools adapting their educational programs for technical and vocational studies. At the present, vocational education at a secondary level is provided through three types of public high schools:

(a) comprehensive high school; (b) area vocational schools; and (c) full-time vocational schools. It is the latter two that are now considered as vocational schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020) reported that in the United States, roughly 35% of the secondary students are enrolled in a vocational school. The NCES (2020) reported that most of the students enrolled in vocational secondary schools are low-income, minority students, and students with disabilities. Therefore, the current educational laws (e.g., IDEA, Section 504, and Carl D. Perkins Act) relate to vocational schools, not only due to their public nature, but because the student population is comprised mostly of those who are receiving services under IDEA.

Similar to general education teachers, CTE educators report considerable challenges teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Adhikari, 2018; Alnahdi, 2019; Eisenman et al., 2010; Hellmich et al., 2019). From a psychological standpoint these educators are, similarly, demonstrating varying levels of self-efficacy within their classrooms. The construct of self-efficacy provides a strong and relevant theoretical framework for examining a teacher's preparation for teaching to students with disabilities (Hellmich et al., 2019). Based on Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy and behavioral change, evidence indicates that there is a relationship between a teacher's instructional self-efficacy and their ability to affect student achievement (e.g., Denzine et al., 2005; Tsrchannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teachers with strong instructional self-efficacy will make greater effort to help their students because of their confidence in their ability to be successful in this effort.

Social

That which is known and referred to as "Full inclusion" is a sociopolitical movement in education that emerged in the early to mid-1980s out of the normalization/de-institutionalization movements, forcefully advanced by members of The Association of Persons with Severe

Handicaps (also known as “TASH”). Much of the published reaction/response to full inclusion by leaders/researchers in special education peaked in the mid- to late-1990s. To those advancing the principle of normalization, individuals with disabilities should live in the same settings/locations as others and have the same opportunities as others. With this belief system, it is easy to see how “the normalization principle leads naturally to the inclusion principle” (Carr et al., 2002, p. 5). Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) point out that TASH’s goal is primarily to abolish special education (because they view it as the root-cause of much of what is wrong in general education), eliminate the continuum of alternative placements/settings, remove the standard curriculum, and promote social competence among typically developing students and students with disabilities in one central setting known as the general classroom, what Fuchs and Fuchs referred to as the Open School revival (see, Dorn et al., 1996, and Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994, for an explanation of the reform history associated with full inclusion and its vilification of special education as a school based form of congregate residential/institutionalized care). Over the years, the principle of full inclusion and its effect on education has created the illusion of cultural/political success despite current and emerging empirical evidence that it has not lived up to its claims (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015; Gilmour et al., 2019; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995).

Regardless of the law and regulations, general educators are finding themselves with classrooms filled with mixed ability and capability students because of district mandated *full inclusion*, which is the idea that all students with disabilities are best served in general education classrooms (Kauffman et al., 2018). This despite the fact that the IDEA does not promote the philosophy of inclusion but instead favors integration by placing students with disabilities, to the *maximum extent appropriate*, in the general classroom with separate placements/service-levels occurring when the nature/severity of the disability is such that an effective education cannot be

provided even with the use of supplementary aids and services (Yell, 2019). Furthermore, the LRE is not a particular setting and does not mandate inclusion (Bateman & Linden, 2012; see also the legal primer prepared for educators and parents about LRE at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498472.pdf>). The IDEA also still mandates the provision of the continuum of alternative placements (Kauffman et al., 2008). In *Letter to Frost* (1991), the Office of Special Education Rehabilitation Services was emphatic about schools needing to provide/maintain a continuum of placements “in order to be properly prepared to address the individual needs of all children with disabilities” (p. 594).

Educators have been caught up in what Kauffman and Badar (2014) refer to as an erroneous belief that the LRE “location” is only the general classroom; however, as Crockett and Kauffman (2001) point out, “restrictiveness” depends on *how* a student might be taught effectively such that they make progress in meeting their IEP goals, and *what* they need to be taught (i.e., their curricular needs) and matching those needs to what alternative placement is optimum for delivering those services. Zigmond’s (2003) study of placement revealed no compelling evidence that the focus on “place” is a critical factor to the academic or social gains made by students with disabilities. After three decades of studying the efficacy of educational placements with students with disabilities, Zigmond concluded that “what goes on in a place, not the location itself, is what makes a difference” (p. 198). That is, what matters most is specially designed, effective teaching not necessarily the location for teaching.

Placing children with varying disabilities into a general education classroom in the name of IDEA’s LRE has not been shown to serve the best interests of all students (Kauffman et al., 2018). That is, many fully inclusive classrooms are failing to provide an *appropriate* education (i.e., that which provides meaningful, empirically validated benefit) for students with disabilities

as required by IDEA (Fuchs et al., 2015; Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016; Yell, 2019), ultimately demonstrating that full inclusion has not lived up its claims (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015). The LRE does not mandate either inclusion or mainstreaming (Bateman & Linden, 2012), and as Kauffman et al. (2005) pointed out in their position paper about IDEA's (2004) placement requirements for students with disabilities, "diversity of instructional needs requires diversity in instructional groups"; in fact, the best test of special education is when students are "receiving good instruction that matches his or her needs, not the student's placement" (p. 2).

Failing inclusive classrooms tend to have decreased or limited learning environments for students with disabilities (Kavkler et al., 2015). Fuchs (2015) and colleagues demonstrated this phenomenon when they tested differing cohorts of children who scored below the 10th percentile in mathematics. Findings from Fuchs et al.'s study indicated that the children receiving specialized (i.e., intensive) fraction intervention rather inclusive education had significantly larger gains in learning and markedly smaller post-intervention achievement gaps (Fuchs et al., 2015). This same phenomenon can also be seen in reading, where it has been reported that students with disabilities are 1.7 standard deviations, or are more than three years, below in reading achievement when compared with their peers (Gilmour et al., 2019). Despite decades of embracing the ideals of inclusion, nationwide evaluations of academic achievement such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Wagner et al., 2003), the parallel Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (Schiller et al., 2008), the federally-sponsored bi-annual National Assessment of Educational Progress evaluation of students with disabilities' academic performance (Fuchs et al., 2017) and meta-analyses of reading comprehension studies from 1997 and 2016 comparing outcomes for K-12 students with and without disabilities (Gilmour et al.,

2018) have pointed to a serious and “abysmal” (Fuchs et al., 2018, p. 127) underachievement of innumerable students with disabilities across the nation.

When students struggle with academics, social exclusion can occur resulting in a discriminatory offense against them (Kevkler et al., 2015). One concern is that children with disabilities within inclusive classrooms are being discriminated against due to their intellectual capacities and capabilities by their peers, and therefore are at risk of being bullied. Gilmour et al. (2019) found that the disability status, interpersonal skills, and internalization of symptoms of a child was significant predictor for bullying and victimization. A student’s well-being is crucial for their learning motivation, effective learning, and quality of life. This well-being is based upon the student’s experiences within their educational environment, such as friendliness of co-students (Gashi & Mojsiska-Blazevski, 2016). If students with special needs are being discriminated against within inclusive classrooms, then it is very likely that they are also being bullied within these same classrooms.

Theoretical

There is a continued ideological push for full inclusion within public education, but there are many legal and pedagogical barriers that prevent the practice of inclusion from being successful (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016). One of the most prominent barriers studied has been teacher’s attitudes towards classroom inclusion (Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2019). Jenson (2018) found that the teacher’s attitude can determine the success of the inclusive classroom. If a teacher has a negative attitude, then the teacher’s performance will be negative leading to a failing inclusive classroom. However, if a teacher has a positive attitude, then their educational instruction will be positive leading to a successful inclusive classroom. This observation led many researchers to investigate what causes a

teacher's attitude to be negative. Teachers' attitudes are built upon their experiences with inclusion, the type of disability, the professional and academic training, school environmental factors, and individual factors or beliefs (Hutzler et al., 2019).

The majority of research done on teacher attitudes in failing inclusive classrooms has been based upon the lack of professional training of general education teachers for inclusivity (Block et al., 2010; Carmargo et al., 2016; Griffith et al., 2019; Pocock & Miyahara, 2018; Yeo, et al., 2016). When teachers have insufficient training in inclusive practices, then their self-efficacy tends to be lower causing them to have a forced negative perception of inclusive classrooms (Block et al., 2010; Carmargo et al., 2016; Griffith et al., 2019). The focus of some research has been on teacher-related factors that impact their attitudes about teaching in inclusive classrooms (Guerra & Wubben, 2017; Kattari, 2015). Such factors include the teacher's theoretical beliefs (Guerra & Wubben, 2017) and opinions about disabilities (Kattari, 2015). Very little research has been dedicated to understanding the experiences of teachers that can sometimes lead to negative attitudes about working with students with disabilities (Guerra & Wubben, 2017; Kattari, 2015). Such experiences are not only related to teacher demographics/characteristics, but also to the professional environment in which they work.

There is also limited research conducted on teachers' experiences with inclusion in vocational settings. Many families with students with disabilities prefer to send their child to vocational schools because they feel that vocational schools can offer the chance for the student to learn functional skills that will make them more employable (Hind et al., 2019). Vocational education is a benefit students with disabilities because it offers real-life connections and active learning (Casale-Giannola, 2012) and has been demonstrated to increase the career success of students with disabilities (Ab Halim et al., 2019). The number of students with disabilities opting

for a vocational education is increasing in size each year (Ozbek et al., 2017), yet there is limited research on the perceived successes and failures of inclusive vocational education. The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences shaping the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts. The aim is to discover what perceived environmental factors and facilitators may be potentially associated with the experiences in the inclusive classroom for general vocational education teachers in the classroom.

Full inclusion is a philosophical stance that has been adopted by many schools as a practice. Simply put, inclusion is the idea that all students with disabilities will spend the majority, or all of their time, in the general education classroom (Yell, 2019). This instructional practice entails bringing support services to a child, rather than educating the child elsewhere away from his or her peers. Anecdotal qualitative studies suggest that while inclusion *may* provide socialization benefits to children with disabilities (McCarty, 2006), there are many perceived barriers, besides the lack of intensive explicit instruction, that prevent the practice of inclusion from being successful (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016). Most current literature is aimed at identifying teacher's attitude, ineffective instructional practices, and lack of teacher training (Grant & Goods-Jones, 2016) as the most prominent barriers to preventing successful inclusion within traditional high school classrooms.

An educator's attitude is built upon the teacher's experience with inclusion, the type of disability, the professional and academic training, school environmental factors, and individual factors (Amr et al., 2016; Hutzler et al., 2019). All of these contributors impact the teacher's self-efficacy and sequentially their instructional methods. Jenson (2018) found that all of the above contributors to a teacher's attitude can be categorized into two factors: teacher-related and

environmental factors. Teacher-related factors are defined as items that the educators, themselves can control. Environmental factors are those items that bring about a positive or negative experience but are not in the control of the teacher.

The majority of literature is based upon identifying the teacher-related factors that contribute to unsuccessful inclusive practices. Such factors include the teacher's self-efficacy, attitudes, beliefs, and training (see, for example, Hutzler et al., 2019; Guerra & Wubben, 2017; Jenson, 2018; Kattari, 2015). There is very little literature surrounding the environmental factors, such as administrative support, physical or fiscal resources, the classroom ecology, and the overall school climate that can also contribute to the teacher's experience with inclusion, and subsequently contribute or affect to their attitude (Jenson, 2018). There is even less current literature documenting the perceived barriers of successful inclusion within vocational high schools. In order to improve the United States vocational education system and outcomes for students with disabilities, it becomes imperative to gain insight into the lived experiences of educators teaching in inclusive vocational classrooms so that concerns may be better understood, and solutions generated.

Inclusive, non-vocational classrooms that do not offer or provide intensive, specially designed instruction tend to have instructional environments that affect the learning progress of students with disabilities (Fuchs, 2015; Kavkler et al., 2015), and that the explanations for these discrepancies tends to largely be based upon teacher-related issues, such as their attitudes, lack of self-efficacy, and lack of training (Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2019). Since inclusion and the sociopolitical policies that drive it are based upon students with disabilities, and since the majority of the student population within vocational schools are those students with disabilities (NCES, 2020), it is imperative to collect data on fully inclusive

classrooms within vocational schools in order to better support teachers.

Situation to Self

As a general educator who originally began as a general education instructor, this study of factors preventing or benefiting successful inclusion as perceived by the educators, is based upon epistemological and axiological philosophical assumptions that align with a qualitative method of inquiry. I hold the epistemological assumption that knowledge about the nature of reality can only be understood through examining lived social realities and experiences, as understood and described by the individual, and the collaboration with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Axiological assumptions address the role of values in research. In a qualitative study, the researcher's values and beliefs influence the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My personal values and beliefs concerning full inclusion within a vocational schools is that it can be a very successful endeavor. However, facilities need to ensure that there is a continuum of services available for the student if needed; per IDEA, the general classroom cannot be the only placement option to address the unique educational needs of students with disabilities. My beliefs and position on the matter can potentially affect the study in that I may tend to see the benefits of inclusion more so than any perceived failings.

As an experienced educator who has experienced the inclusive classrooms within a vocational high school, I hold a positionality in relation to this context. I can relate to general educators due to my career and as a general educator within inclusive classrooms. My biases of having been in both a failing inclusive classroom and a successful inclusive classroom allow me to see the circumstances for the educator's perspective. Using an epistemological paradigm, I will rely on quotes from participants, and collaborate and spend time with the participants. There

are certain basic assumptions about how research should be done (and reported) that are deeply engrained by one's methodological training, and the philosophical assumptions associated with one's methodological approach helps guide researchers in their research efforts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the rhetorical assumption in this qualitative research study is that I am not necessarily "truth seeking", but instead will be reporting what and how "reality" is defined from the participants' perspective.

Within qualitative studies, interpretive frameworks are a necessity. Through a pragmatic and constructivist framework, I plan to describe the shared phenomenon of perceived environmental factors influencing the self-efficacy of educators in failing and successful inclusive classrooms. Individuals holding an interpretive framework based on pragmatism focus on the outcomes of the study, rather than the antecedent conditions, while those with constructivist focus on shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). That means I will not only be relying on inductive evidence, but also subjective evidence in order to appease my epistemological beliefs. I also, will discuss values that reflect not only my own, but also my participants so that axiological beliefs will be portrayed.

Problem Statement

The problem is that there is a limited information and insight into the experiences of general educators with inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities in public vocational schools. Research is needed to describe the essence of their experience, and the meaning they ascribe to the phenomenon of environmental factors that attribute to successful or failing inclusive classrooms. Related to this is the lack of insight into the factors shaping the self-efficacy general education teachers in vocational classrooms have with regard to supporting students with disabilities in their classrooms. With mounting evidence demonstrating poor

educational outcomes for students with disabilities in an era of inclusion (see, for example, Fuchs et al., 2017; Fuchs et al., 2018; Schiller et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2003), some leaders/researchers in special education have pointed out that placing children with varying disabilities into a general education classroom in the name of “full inclusion” has not been shown to serve the best interests of all students with disabilities and is eroding FAPE, the central tenet of IDEA (Calhoun et al., 2018; Kauffman et al., 2018). That is, many fully inclusive classrooms are failing to provide an *appropriate* education (i.e., that which provides meaningful, empirically validated benefit) for students with disabilities as required by IDEA (Fuchs et al., 2015; Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016; Yell, 2019), ultimately demonstrating that full inclusion has not lived up its claims (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015).

An educator’s instructional self-efficacy has been found to play an important role in students’ academic success of the classroom (Zee & Kooman 2016). Thus, if a vocational educator has low instructional self-efficacy in teaching students with disabilities, then the academic success of their class could be negatively impacted because of their limited knowledge about and confidence in addressing their students’ unique educational needs. One’s self-efficacy is believed to be impacted by performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states/feedback (e.g., stress, anxiety, etc.) (Denzine et al., 2005). Bandura (1977) indicated that “the more dependable the experiential sources, the greater are the changes in perceived self-efficacy” (p. 191), for better or for worse. The gap in knowledge concerns what specific experiential sources or factors do vocational educators describe as experiences that influence their instructional self-efficacy/confidence in teaching students with disabilities in their inclusive classrooms. This study’s use of transcendental phenomenological inquiry is designed to address the problem concerning the lack of information about the

experiences and factors related to the self-efficacy of teachers working with students with disabilities, so they succeed in the inclusive classroom setting.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The aim is to discover what perceived factors and facilitators, may be potentially associated with the experiences in the inclusive classroom for general vocational education teachers at McMuffin Technical School (pseudonym) that impact their self-efficacy and ultimately their ability to teach to inclusive classrooms. Bandura's (1978) theory of self-efficacy will be applied to this study as it provides a lens to examine how an educator's perceived self-efficacy can impact their pedagogy within vocational classrooms. At this stage in the research, environmental factors will be generally defined as external influences that are neither related to a teacher or a student (Jenson, 2018). Examples of these external influences include, but are not limited to, available resources, class size, funding, type of disabilities within the class, or stakeholder collaboration. While internal factors will be those items associated with the educator him or herself, including training, attitude towards the philosophy of inclusion, and experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study may add to add to the works of current researchers who have attributed failing inclusive classrooms to the teachers (Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2019). Jenson (2018) stated that environmental influences that neither relate to teacher or students can create a negative attitude by fostering a negative experience; however, Jenson failed to mention or clarify what those environmental influences are, or how

environmental influences might also foster positive experiences. Very few researchers have sought to classify some environmental influences as class sizes, adequacy of school facilities, access to resources, and support from families (Jenson, 2018; Yeo et al., 2016) that can impact an educator's perceived self-efficacy. However, these studies do not mention specifics, such as what constitutes a large class size, or what make a facility adequate. The authors of these studies did not explain why these environmental influences created such a negative experience for the educators within vocational high schools, and conversely, how positive experiences might be facilitated through positive environmental influences.

The high school research site identifies itself as a full inclusive vocational secondary school. However, the high school only became fully inclusive two years ago and leaders in the district have declared that general educators, who are trained in inclusive practices, are struggling with the inclusive practices. By studying specific influences within the specified vocational high school, it may help identify and clarify what perceived factors are influencing attitudes in the general educators, so that their implementation of inclusion is a successful experience for students. This study may help identify the shared experiences of educators that impact their perceived self-efficacy in working with students with disabilities. Understanding perceived influences may help other vocational schools of districts identify positive and negative influences within their own inclusive classrooms and identify solutions for increasing teacher self-efficacy.

Research Questions

The proposed research questions for this study have two merits. The first is to learn how educators define whether inclusive classrooms as successful or unsuccessful. The second merit is to collect information about the shared experiences of the perceived failed or successful inclusive

classrooms within the vocational school. The following are the planned research questions for this study:

RQ1: What are the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

This study seeks to identify the factors that influence the self-efficacy of general educators teaching in inclusive vocational classrooms. For example, what is it that educators perceive would help make an inclusive classroom successful, or would help their classroom? This question seeks to understand the overall experiences of general education teachers working with vocational students in inclusive settings. What is it that educators are specifically lacking or needing in order to help their classrooms succeed or help the teacher feel they can succeed and be more confident in teaching students with disabilities, as it relates to their perceived self-efficacy (Cochrane, 2016)?

RQ2: What prior experiences shape the self-efficacy of general education teachers working with students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational settings in Massachusetts?

Many educators and the teaching techniques they choose to use or not to use are affected by their own perceived self-efficacy (Arnaiz Sanchez et al., 2019). This question seeks to understand what perceived experiences help or hinder educators that work in fully inclusive classrooms. It seeks to highlight what vicarious or past events may have impacted the teachers.

RQ3: How do individual factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

This research questions seeks to understand what individual factors may influence the educator's self-efficacy and subsequent classroom instruction. It seeks to understand what current attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets the educators have that may impact their self-efficacy. Bandura's (1978) theory of self-efficacy highlights the importance of attitude in self-efficacy. A positive attitude can lead to a higher self-efficacy (Cochrane, 2016); therefore, this question seeks to understand what perceived internal factors may be seen as factors in self-efficacy

RQ4: How do current school environmental factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

The fourth question asks general education teachers about what supports or services they are finding are common for their inclusive classrooms, and whether or not their classrooms can accommodate these services or supports. Many classrooms have environmental factors that may be preventing a service from being given within a classroom. These questions seek to understand if educators perceive a lack of support (Sharma et al., 2017) causing poor implementation of educational services. This question looks at the resources available, the classroom sizes, the funding, and the physical availability of the room.

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study in question include the following:

1. *Attitude* - a psychological cognition that is built upon a person's experience, education, beliefs, and environmental factors (Jenson, 2018).
2. *Environmental factors*— external influences neither related to the student or the teacher (Jenson, 2018).

3. *Inclusion* – a sociopolitical movement in education that has been occurring since the 1980s, which is the idea that all students with disabilities are best served in general education classrooms (Kauffman et al., 2018).
4. *Internal factors*- Influences that are related to the student or teacher that can impact academic success (Jenson, 2018).
5. *Self-efficacy* – an individual’s confidence due to their knowledge or education on a topic matter (Yeo et al., 2016).

Summary

While there has been positive and steady progress from exclusion to inclusion for people with disabilities over the decades, research suggests that more progress is needed when it comes to educating students with disabilities in general education settings. Given the foundational role of the teacher in the educational process, research is needed to understand the factors influencing the self-efficacy of general education teachers. Regardless of the child’s disability, their educational needs, or behavioral needs, it is the government’s desire to place these children in the least restrictive environment. The claimed success of inclusion in mainstream education is under scrutiny (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs et al., 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019). Many general education teachers report that the students within their classrooms are not succeeding (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016) and it is because of this perceived lack of success within the classroom that many studies have been conducted to understand and improve inclusion (Block et al., 2010; Carmargo et al., 2016; Griffith et al., 2019; Pocock & Miyahara, 2018; Yeo et al., 2016). However, very few studies have focused on inclusion within vocational school settings.

Current research focuses the failures and successes of inclusive education on the educators by applying Bandura’s (1999) theory of self-efficacy to educators’ perceptions,

attitudes, and beliefs that correlate to their shared experiences. It is hypothesized that due to the negative attitudes of the general education teachers about teaching to an inclusive classroom, the resulting behavior is also negative, which leads to the unsuccessful classroom. If a general education teacher has a negative perception about inclusion, then their behavior will be poor, and their pedagogical implementation will be weak. Current research is aimed at discovering ways to alleviate the negative teacher attitudes by improving teacher self-efficacy (Block et al., 2018) through teacher professional development and training. A few publications (see, for example, Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2019) have documented that there are other factors influencing inclusion, such as environmental factors, and the stakeholder's perceptions, but there seems to be minimal articles that seek to highlight methods for fixing these flaws, nor delve deeper into their causes.

Even teacher attitudes, can be impacted by their environmental surroundings or internal factors. It is important to study this area of environmental factors so that educators can eliminate all possible and probable barriers that prevent students from learning in an inclusive classroom. The problem therefore is that there is a gap in literature, from a qualitative stance, identifying the phenomenon of perceived environmental factors that have impacted a teacher's living, past or vicarious experiences with inclusion in vocational high schools, and ultimately their self-efficacy. Using a phenomenological inquiry approach, this study hopes to discover what educators perceive as environmental factors and facilitators that contribute to either positive or negative experiences in the inclusive classroom and teachers' level of self-efficacy with regard to inclusive education at McCann Technical School.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of literature was conducted to explore the perceived factors influencing the success of inclusive classrooms within traditional high schools and vocational high schools. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to factors in inclusive classrooms within both contexts. In the first section of the overview, the theories relevant to inclusion, relevant to an educator's attitude of classroom success, and the theories that demonstrate how the educator's behavior impacts the success of inclusion are discussed. The following section presents a synthesis of recent literature regarding inclusive success in the classroom. It also incorporates the perceived educator attitudinal factors to inclusion, and the role factors, such as educator behavior, plays in the success of inclusive education. This will be followed by an overview that documents literature surrounding the factors that lead to the attitudes of educators. These factors include teacher-related (such as simple demographics), and environmental (such as class size). The final section of this literature review documents the few research studies done on inclusive education within vocational high schools. This section highlights how educators within vocational high schools have similar barriers to traditional high school inclusion yet are underrepresented within the research community.

Literature Search Strategies

A detailed search strategy was developed and revised appropriately for the following electronic databases from the Liberty University online library: Academic Search Ultimate, Education Research Complete, JSTOR, and ERIC (EBSCO) for the time period of 2005-2021, using English only text from established peer-reviewed journals. Due to the lack of academic articles in the areas of inclusive education in public vocational high schools, a wider search

strategy was undertaken using more general terms such as: *inclusive education, education-for-all, mainstream education, barriers to mainstream education, barriers to inclusive education, teacher attitudes, teacher experience, self-efficacy, environmental barriers, class size, stakeholder perceptions, vocational education benefits, successes to mainstream education, success to inclusive education, accommodations in vocations, modification in vocations, and special education in vocations* to identify studies for inclusion to this review. Variations of these terms were used to exhaust the research. Inclusive education within public education was used as a reference. The articles were then reduced based upon duplications, language, setting, quality (peer-reviewed) and relevance. Dissertations were not considered relevant within this study. I also reviewed relevant academic books and organizational publications relevant to the topic. A total of 663 articles were discovered on the topic of inclusive education and of these 103 peer reviewed articles were used because they pertained most to the topic at hand.

Theoretical Framework

When conducting a qualitative phenomenological study, it is imperative to identify the theoretical frameworks that may influence the research process. This literature review examines how the phenomenon fully inclusive classrooms can be hindered or made successful by environmental barriers or internal factors. There have been many studies aimed at providing frameworks on inclusive factors (Block et al., 2010; Carmargo et al., 2016; Griffith et al., 2019; Pocock & Miyahara, 2018; Yeo et al., 2016). Most of these studies indicate that the attitudes of general education teachers can impact the success or failure of the classroom. The findings from these studies suggest that the barriers to inclusive education are teacher-based or controlled rather than environmental. These studies are based upon the self-efficacy theory.

Self-Efficacy Theory

A theory utilized in inclusive educational research is the self-efficacy theory, a subset of Bandura's (1978) social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory addresses psychosocial factors and motivations influencing behaviors and methods used to promote sustained behavior change (Bandura, 1978). This theory explains human behavior in terms of a three-way dynamic: environmental determinants, behavioral determinants, and personal determinants. The basic premise is that people learn not only through their own experiences, but also by observing that actions of others and the results that those actions garner (Wilson et al., 2016). The social cognitive theory posits that individuals are neither controlled automatically by external events nor driven by inner forces; instead, they actively participate and impact their own self-development, they adapt to change and opportunity, and they embark on self-renewal over time (Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

The self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1978) is not a direct aspect of the social cognitive theory but plays an integral part. According to Bandura's (1978) approach two key determinants of behavior are perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectancies. The latter determinant is seen within the social cognitive theory with the perceived positive and negative consequences of determining a behavior (Bandura, 1978). The self-efficacy theory posits as a motivational construct which emerges from social cognitive theory. It is based on self-perception of competence rather than a person's actual level of competence (Woodcock & Jones, 2020).

Bandura (1978) theorized that an individual's perceived efficacy will determine their behavior. That is, if an individual feels inadequate at something, or is unprepared for something, then their behavior will mimic this. Since most human motivation is cognitively generated, self-beliefs in efficacy are important human motivation factors (Nia, 2020).

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1978).

Bandura (1978) described four main sources of influence by which a person's self-efficacy is developed and maintained: (a) mastery experiences or performance accomplishments; (b) vicarious experiences; (c) verbal or social persuasion; and (d) physiological, or emotional states. Mastery experiences is the most effective way to make a strong sense of efficacy (Nia, 2020). If an educator has success and accomplishments within teaching to a subset, then their self-efficacy will be greatly influenced and therefore their behavior impacted (Block et al., 2010).

Vicarious experiences through observance of social models can also influence a person's efficacy as long as the observed model has a degree of similarity between the observer and the model. If an observer sees an individual similar to himself or herself succeed, then the observer's beliefs that they too can master the activity will arise (Bandura, 1978). However, observing failures will also lower self-efficacy. The greater the degree of similarity between the observer and the model, then the greater the chance of the model influencing the observer's efficacy (Nia, 2020). If an educator witnesses others like himself or herself succeeding within the inclusive classroom, their efficacy will increase, thereby influencing their behaviors (Block et al., 2010).

Verbal and social persuasion can also influence one's efficacy, as long as there is already some form of mastery to the behavior (Bandura, 1978). It is a way of strengthening people's beliefs that they have what it takes to succeed. It offers a temporary boost in perceived ability. Typically, individuals who are persuaded verbally that they have the capabilities to master an activity are likely to mobilize greater effort than if they harbored self-doubts (Bandura, 1978).

Individuals also rely on physiological or emotional states when judging their efficacies. Stress and tension are usually signs of poor performance (Bandura, 1978). Therefore, physical

pains and mood can affect the perception of ability. Bandura (1978) noted that individuals with high self-efficacy will perceive affective arousal as a facilitator, while those with self-doubts will perceive it as debilitating.

Beliefs of self-efficacy work in coordination with component skill and incentive to act (Nia, 2020). Self-efficacy correlates with the locus of control. Individuals can either have an internal locus of control where they will believe outcomes are related to their actions, or they can have an external locus of control where they blame others for their life circumstances (Pearman et al., 2021). This idea of locus of control relates to self-efficacy because those individuals with a high self-efficacy tend to possess characteristics of resiliency, perseverance, and motivation, all of which align with an internal locus of control (Pearman et al., 2021). Livers et al. (2019) found that a teacher's self-efficacy is interpreted as their own confidence in teaching capabilities and the competencies that they relate to instructional variations. That is highly efficacious teachers are more likely to try new methodologies because they believe in their ability to problem solve, and they are committed to understanding a student's mistakes (Livers et al., 2019). When educators have an internal locus of control, they tend to have a higher self-efficacy because they see that failure can be surmounted by skill-acquisition or further investigation to increase their knowledge (Pearman et al., 2021). Therefore, an educator's self-efficacy and teaching practice relate to effective teaching.

Current research that utilizes the self-efficacy theory in relation to inclusive education notes that there is a positive relationship between the training that teachers already have, the knowledge related to attention to diversity and the teacher's willingness to continue training themselves (see, for example, Alnahdi, 2019; Juan de Dios Uriarte et al., 2019; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Therefore, there is importance of teacher resilience in the area of inclusive education in

regard to the educator's self-efficacy. What this indicates is that teacher qualification is not significantly related to attitudes towards inclusion but is negatively associated with their self-efficacy beliefs concerning inclusive practices.

Block et al. (2010) stated that self-efficacy is a situational form of self-confidence, and if this confidence is low, then the teacher's educational performance will be low. Thus, the conclusion was that the barrier to inclusive education classes was the educator's own low self-efficacy towards teaching a student with disabilities (Block et al., 2010). If a teacher is unprepared, or uneducated in teaching students with disabilities, then their self-efficacy or confidence will suffer resulting in low performance. Self-efficacy is thought of as one's confidence in their ability to produce a performance.

Block et al. (2010) successfully demonstrated that when educators have a poor self-efficacy, it is likely due to the fact that they are unprepared, or untrained in the curriculum or methodology they are about to partake. So, if an individual has both the component skills required to succeed and the internal locus of control incentives, their sense of self-efficacy will determine what activities a person will choose to engage in, and how much effort they will expend. Therefore, the self-efficacy subset of the social cognitive theory applies to the success of inclusion because if an educator is unprepared to teach to an inclusive classroom, or if they blame their failures on others, then their self-efficacy will be low, and ultimately their instructional methodology will be low. Determining the best methods to improve self-efficacy in an educator is, therefore, one method for ensuring successful pedagogical practices within inclusive classrooms.

Related Literature

A focus on anything other than instruction undercuts the legal and moral rights of

students with disabilities to an appropriate education, yet the one the largest and most extended debates in education is a topic within the field of special education known as inclusion (Kauffman & Badar, 2014). Special education within the American educational system is based upon two historical assumptions. The first is that disability is a deviant and needs to be eradicated, and the second is that all special services should be given in separate environments (Kirby, 2017). However, a decades long trend in special education is working on dismantling these assumptions. Inclusion is a term which expresses commitment to educate every child to the maximum extent appropriate in the least restrictive environment (Jenson, 2018) and entails the ideal of bringing the support services to the child with disabilities, rather than moving the child elsewhere.

Two laws govern education of children with disabilities: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Again, neither of these laws require full inclusion, but stress the importance that a significant effort should be made to find an inclusive placement if applicable, or to educate in the LRE. Although LRE was a foundational concept in 1975, the IDEA, amended in 2004, requires that children with disabilities be educated in the LRE to meet their needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The IDEA states that it is not appropriate to place all children in a regular general education classroom, but rather a continuum of placements are made available. Section 504 on the other hand mandates that a child with disabilities should be placed in the regular educational environment unless it is proven to be ineffective (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Even though these regulations push towards inclusion, the current educational practices in some states in the United States perpetuate isolation and until new assumptions are made within the American educational system inclusion will remain a failure (Kirby, 2017).

Regardless of the law and regulations, general educators around the world are finding themselves with a classroom filled with mixed ability and capability students due to the steady growth of inclusive education (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014). Many reviews of literature have demonstrated that while inclusion has shown to benefit children with disabilities and those without disabilities, there are many factors that influence the success of inclusion (Hind et al., 2019; Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016; Jenson, 2018; Kirby, 2017) specifically within general academic schools. A few of the most prominent factors researched include teacher attitudes, instructional practices, and teacher training (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016), however there are other factors that have yet to be identified, or have little research done on them.

Teacher Perceptions as a Barrier

A common barrier that has been dissected by multiple sources (Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018) is the attitude of teachers. Educators are seen as key agents who are expected to transform inclusive policy into practice in classrooms. This means that teachers' beliefs about implementation of inclusive education is useful in perceiving the success of inclusive education and has therefore become baseline in measuring its success (Opoku et al., 2020). For instance, beliefs about teachers' perception of inclusive education support services available in schools and their confidence to practice inclusive education have become the baseline to assess effectiveness of practices. Jenson (2018) conducted a synthesis of research and found that a teacher's attitude toward inclusion can determine the success of the inclusive classroom.

The educator's perceptions towards inclusive education are a fundamental aspect in the practice's success (Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014). The attitude that can impact successful inclusion is built upon the teacher's experience with inclusion and the type of disability, the

professional and academic training of inclusion, school environmental factors, and the individual factors (Hutzler et al., 2019). The attitude of the educator in their efforts towards inclusion is based upon multifaceted variables. For instance, the teachers' attitudes towards teaching students with disability can be influenced by their own attributes, student characteristics and environmental variables such as the availability of resources in schools (Opoku et al., 2020). Jenson (2018) found that all of the above contributors to a teacher's attitude can be categorized into two factors: teacher-related factors, and environmental factors. Teacher-related factors include personal experiences, and self-efficiency. The personal experiences of the educator include professional experiences, competencies, and personal beliefs (Pavitola, 2017). While environmental factors are items found within the teaching environment that the teacher cannot readily control. These environmental factors include the type of educational institution, where teaching staff is employed, the number of children with disabilities within the classroom, and the support in the professional environment (Opoku et al., 2020; Pavitola, 2017).

Human endeavors such as the implementation of inclusive education are thought to be grounded in belief systems. So, understanding the beliefs of teachers is necessary to help appreciate contributors to their willingness to adopt inclusive practices (Opoku et al., 2020). Pavitola (2017) found that teachers' attitudes can be defined as professorially relevant subjective concepts that primarily affect perceptions of the environment, professional interactions with students, and can ultimately determine the classroom climate. In the context of inclusive education, teachers are active participants and must be motivated in providing quality education. This means teachers who have a positive attitude tend to accept responsibility for teaching a wide variety of students and they feel confident instructing their students. The reason for this is that having a positive attitude enhances teachers' professional curiosity, it motivates them to

improve their pedagogy, and enables them overcome challenges (Pavitola, 2017).

The views and the attitudes of the teachers, who play an essential role in the formation of the character of students, towards the environment and teaching are critical. Teachers' attitudes are reflected in their behaviors in the classroom and the classroom practices. Positive attitudes in the teaching profession can be summarized as being interested in teaching, taking care of teaching environments, and loving and appreciating students (Kirkic & Cetinkayka, 2020). Positive teaching attitudes increase the effectiveness of learning environments. Ultimately, a teacher's positive attitude towards inclusion, provision of resources and creating an inclusive culture where teachers are given relevant services could have a positive impact on the teacher's intentions and behavior in their classrooms (Opoku et al., 2020).

Experience

Teacher-related factors are also due to demographics such as age, length within the profession, and the amount of experience with teaching children with disabilities (Jenson, 2018). One researcher found that the younger the teacher is, and the more inexperienced they are, then the more likely they will have a more positive attitude towards inclusive education (Hind et al., 2019) and the more likely they will have a successful inclusive classroom. Other demographics that can lead to a more positive attitude include gender. It has been documented that females tend to have a better attitude toward inclusive education than males (Hind et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018).

A teacher's level of qualifications has direct implications for instructional practices, particularly with professional collaboration. Teachers with more years of experience in special education were found to influence professional collaboration more than those educators with minimal experience (Dea & Negassa, 2019). The more years of experience within the specialized field an educator has within the education field, then the more willing they are to collaborate and

adapt their teaching strategies to classroom rigor. Educators with more specialized training in special education had a more positive perception of classroom success using inclusive practices (Kwon et al., 2017). This special training includes direct courses related to teaching inclusive classrooms or teaching students with special needs. When educators were able to learn alternate practices for educating students with special needs, then their classroom methodology improves. Giving educators the opportunity to study different disabilities allows them the opportunity to manifest a positive attitude, which then enhances their classroom practices (Kwon et al., 2017).

Additionally, it has been documented those general education teachers that had years of experience in the classroom were less likely to collaborate professionally, and less willing to work within inclusive classrooms (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). The theory behind this study was that general educators who were close to retirement, tended to not want to change their teaching methods. These educators had been practicing for years and utilizing a method that they perceive to work; therefore, they did not want to change their tactics (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013).

Teacher's Self-Efficacy

Most of the younger educators have taken pedagogical courses on educating students with disabilities, something that more experienced teachers were not required to undertake (Jenson, 2018). When teachers take training programs that integrate special education studies the result demonstrates to be a stronger self-efficacy of educators in including and integrating pupils with special needs (Shani & Hebel, 2016). This prior knowledge of methods of instruction for students with disabilities increases the self-efficacy, or confidence, of educators, which has been shown to increase academic performance (Jenson, 2018). Specifically, secondary education teachers reported lower teaching efficacy beliefs for inclusion than pre-school, primary, and

special education teachers (San Martin et al., 2021).

When a general educator is given training on specific disabilities, such as behaviorally based interventions and then asked to teach an inclusive classroom (Carmargo et al., 2016), the educator's confidence in being able to teach to said classroom and therefore their practices are better. This perceived success in inclusive education can be attributed to not only the fact that the teacher now has skills and experiences for dealing with the challenging behaviors and instructional differences (Yeo et al., 2016), but the self-efficacy of the educator has increased. When educators are taught skills for teaching a child with disabilities their self-efficacy, also referred to as confidence, increases which in turn increases their performance (Block et al., 2018). In addition, when educators take special education courses, they learn strategies that they can synthesize and transfer into their own lesson planning and classroom management (Kahn et al., 2017), and it is this skill that increases their self-efficacy and indirectly their education methods. Not only should initial teacher-training courses be aimed at instructing special education, but teacher training should further be enhanced through continued in-service trainings to create a continuous knowledge of skills to increase self-efficacy (Possi & Milinga, 2017).

Teachers with higher levels of teacher self-efficacy are found to have higher proficiency in adjusting teaching strategies and pedagogy that positively impact student outcomes (Jenson, 2018; Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Teacher attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion are impacted and influenced not only by their educational training, but also by the vast political, social and educational environments (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). All of these factors can impact a teacher's commitment to the principles of social justice, equity, and inclusion, and ultimately their own self-efficacy. So, even following a professional development course, some teachers some maintain their belief that students with disabilities would be better accommodated for in a

segregated special class (Kahn et al., 2017) and this finding suggests that the sufficient conditions required for inclusive practice are not just within increasing self-efficacy with training courses, but also through impacting the social, political, and educational environments.

An educator's experience and knowledge of methods for teaching mainstream classrooms are not the only components for increasing self-efficacy, but rather the school environment can also impact an educator's self-efficacy. If a school environment has a perceived high collective efficacy and the climate promotes mainstream education, then this can foster an educator's own self-efficacy (Wilson, 2018) by engaging their belief systems. When an educator sees other colleagues successfully incorporating mainstream classrooms, then this modeling allows him or her to perceive that they can do it as well.

A study done with primary educators found that educators perceived their self-efficacy and beliefs as cause to their (in) capacities to their student's needs in a mainstream classroom (Bruggink et al., 2015). These educators discerned four sources of help or hindrance to which they attribute their success or lack of success within the classroom: the teacher him or herself, student characteristics, the school condition, and working conditions. Of these components, the educators perceived that their own attitude and self-efficacy affected the classroom the most (Bruggink et al., 2015). The more skills and practice that educators have within an area, even a specialized area, then the more confident they feel to teach it, and the better their teaching skills will be (Block et al., 2018).

Teacher-related factors include their own personal beliefs and attitudes, demographics, and self-efficacy. All three of these components play and rely on one another. A teacher's beliefs are made of their theoretical opinions about proficient teaching to culturally sensitive areas, and their deficit beliefs associated with pre-existing cognitions in academic outcomes of diverse

student populations (Guerra & Wubben, 2017) and it is these deficit beliefs that tend to be consistent with an educator's behavior. For an educator, having a positive behavior, determined by the attitude is essential in inclusive success because this behavior can ally and increase rapport between abled and disabled peers (Kattari, 2015).

A positive attitude can also be formulated by the experience an educator has within the field and ultimately their self-efficacy. The more experience that an educator has in the field of education, and the more knowledge he or she has, the higher his or her self-efficacy will be in teaching in that area. When an educator has both experience and a high self-efficacy then there is a correlation with a positive attitude towards teaching to an inclusive classroom. In fact the strongest predictor of a high self-efficacy and ultimately a positive attitude is experience in teaching students with disabilities (Hind et al., 2019; Malinen et al., 2013). When educators gain experience in teaching students with differing disabilities, either through personal experience or through training programs, their confidence increases.

Environmental Factors

The attitudes of educators within inclusive settings can also be impacted by the environmental barriers, or factors present. Environmental factors are typically problems within the classroom or school climate that the teacher cannot control. Much of the current research focuses on the negative attitudes of educators due to their own beliefs (see, for example, Hind et al., 2019; Hutzler et al., 2019; Jenson, 2018) and self-efficacy (see, Shani & Hebel, 2016; Yeo et al., 2016). However, few research highlights that external influences can cause a negative attitude by creating a negative experience for the educator (Bruggink et al., 2015; Jenson, 2018). These external influences that are neither related to teacher or student. The external influences can create a negative attitude in the teacher by creating a negative experience and environment

(Yeo et al., 2016). Environmental factors, or external influences, can include class size, the adequacy of the school facility, access to resources and time, curriculum issues, and support from the families. Many educators perceive their largest environmental barriers to be the lack of physical facilities, time, finance, support services, and flexible curricula (Majoko, 2018).

Class Size

A large factor influencing inclusion is the environment, even when a teacher has a positive attitude about inclusion; the environment that they need to perform in can hinder their success. Many educators feel that a large class size impedes their ability to drastically differentiate instruction for all students and hinders them from giving the correct interventions to those children who require it (Walker et al., 2018). When classes are large in size, then students that require more one-on-one time are not able to receive the time they need because the teacher has to focus his or her attention on all of the students. Even with paraprofessional assistance within a classroom, the large class sizes have been found to greatly hinder the success of inclusive education (Walker et al., 2018). Large class sizes mean that educators have limited time to spend with each student (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). Individual instruction is fundamental to the success of inclusive education but, when faced with the realities of big class sizes, challenge arises for teachers to provide individual support without compromising academic quality and time for the other learners in the inclusive classroom.

When educators and professionals have large classes that have a high demand of individual support, then the amount of time that the professional can spend with the student is minimal (Hind et al., 2019). In this instance the educator cannot form the relationship required to understand what the students requires for accommodations. This can prevent the educator from truly knowing what each student needs in order to learn correctly.

Many educators feel that large class sizes of any level cannot be implemented (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). With many children in the same class, it makes it difficult, if not impossible to teach at every learner's pace. Hunter-Johnson and Newton (2014) also found that when there were large class sizes of diverse student populations, the educators are overwhelmed by the fact that they cannot include all learners nor give enough attention to the special needs of all learners, and this causes educators to develop a negative attitude about inclusive education.

With large class sizes also comes the challenge of the lack of physical space. When many students are put into one classroom, the lack of physical space for each student and for the teacher becomes minimal (Materechera, 2020). This makes moving between students difficult for educators. It also provides more interference for students that then to be easily distracted. Many students with a learning disability struggle with distractions, and when they are placed in a large class the noise level, and the ease of distractions can become harmful (Materechera, 2020).

Lack of Resources

Concurrent with large class size there is usually relation to a lack of resources. When educational facilities do not have the funds to pay for additional educators, they also tend to lack funding for resources. Large class sizes coupled with lack of modern classrooms and facilities impedes in the teaching and learning process (Asemanyi, 2015). In order for any education to be successful, the right supports are needed. These supports are most often found in the form of therapists, behavioral analysts, or even paraprofessionals (Walker et al., 2018). Supports can also include access to specific textbooks or software (Sirota, 2017). Most times the lack of supports is due to the lack of government and school administration support, funding, or knowledge (Sharma et al., 2017).

When there are no resources to assist in educating individuals with disabilities, then the teacher cannot correctly perform no matter how positive his or her attitude is about inclusive education. When there is a lack of resources available, an educator will struggle to teach the students with disabilities because accommodations will not be met adequately. There is a strong correlation that a lack of support enhances the educator's negative attitudes towards inclusive education (Jenson, 2018; Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). Lack of support not only includes physical resources, but also support from specialized professionals. When educators have sufficient learning resources and support services available this helps them meet the needs of their students. This support can come in the terms of assistant teachers, remedial and special educators, and co-teachers (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). When educators have the correct support, it lessens the demands of teaching to an inclusive classroom and therefore helps make a more successful environment.

Included within lack of resources for teachers is the lack of time, since time is seen as a resource. Teachers have reported that they feel there is a lack of time for lesson preparation to inclusive classrooms, provision of feedback, and giving individual learner-support for all learners (Hind et al; 2019; Materechera, 2020). Time is crucial in teaching to general education classrooms, and more so in the application of inclusive education where support for learners with disabilities creates a barrier since the educator has to ensure that each learner's educational needs are met. Therefore, some educators feel that the further demands of inclusive education on time could cause them to compromise their dedication and commitment to care (Materechera, 2020).

Curriculum Issues

Even with the right support services, sometimes, the stringency of a curriculum can hinder the educational outcomes. If a curriculum is flexible so that educators can make

modifications, then there is a higher chance of success within inclusive classrooms (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). However, when a curriculum is not accessible and responsive to the needs to all learners in the class, then it does not enable a school to accommodate diversity to the learner population. A curriculum that is too rigid centralized and fails to reflect the diversity of the learners will have a negative impact on the learning outcomes. This means that educators that need to finish the curriculum in a time frame, would be challenged to accommodate learners, and may be unable to complete the curriculum on time (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). The current curriculum within most inclusive schools is not designed for the flexibility required for it. This curriculum, especially in secondary schools, is content heavy (Sharma et al., 2017). This flexible, content-laden curriculum makes catering to inclusive classrooms difficult and daunting.

Stakeholder Perceptions

Another factor that can impact the attitude of educators is the perceptions of stakeholders. These external influences, which can also be considered as an environmental influence, are not related to the teacher and can cause the teacher to experience a horrible teaching situation that can ultimately lead to a negative attitude (Jenson, 2018). This environmental influence holds its own separate category because it is not an immediate environmental impact, but rather a secondary one. Stakeholders can come in the forms of parents and guardians, educators, paraprofessionals, students with disabilities, and students without disabilities (Weglarz-Ward & Santos, 2018). All of these individuals have a say in education, and assist the teacher with education through collaborations, and therefore can help cause a failing inclusive setting (Roberts & Simpson, 2016) depending upon their collaboration (Kendall, 2019).

Stakeholders, such as administrators within a building or other educators, can also create a climate within the school that can impact the efficacy and attitude of the educator. When a

school has a collective high efficacy due to the experience and the positive attitude of the stake holders, then the educator can also form a high efficacy (Wilson, 2018). So, if educators have the support of their stakeholders and have the shared collective efficacy then the mainstream classroom should be successful in nature (Wilson, 2018).

Teachers' pedagogical skills, resources and the severity of students' disability influence their attitudes and self-efficacy (Opoku et al., 2020). Regardless of teachers' skills, they may not adequately practice inclusive education if they do not receive support from significant others such as principals. This includes support from principals and administrators with respect to making resources available. However, many public institutions rely on government funding, and so principals cannot make resources available without adequate funding.

Parent Perceptions

In a recent study it was documented that most parents have little knowledge about inclusion (Ceylan & Aral, 2016). Inclusion requires that a collaboration between stakeholders and educators occur (Ruben et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2017), thus when parents have little knowledge of inclusion it makes collaboration that much more difficult. For example, a study determined that a group of parents felt that inclusion is beneficial for students with orthopedic disabilities, but not behavioral or learning disorders (Ceylan & Aral, 2016). The parents believed that placing students with learning or behavior problems would actually hinder the education of the student's without disabilities (Ceylan & Aral, 2016). This parental attitude for inclusion makes discerning modifications and accommodations a tedious and difficult task, since the parents are either against inclusion or have little knowledge of it.

Parent perceptions of inclusion also impact parental collaboration. Positive parent-educator collaboration is critical for educational success (Schultz et al., 2016). When parents

perceive inclusive education for something it is not, this can cause a hindrance to the needed collaboration and can ultimately harm the educational practice. When parents perceive inclusion as a negative methodology, not only will their perceptions harm the education of the child, but it will also prevent the parent from the needed participation in the educational practice.

Student Perceptions

Research on students' perceptions and outcomes of inclusion has focused mainly on students with disabilities as opposed to students without disabilities. Despite this, findings from Kart and Kart's (2021) recent systematic review of the literature suggests that (a) the effect of inclusion on students without disabilities' academic achievement is mixed with positive/neutral effects found at the lower grade levels and negative/neutral influence found in later grades; and (b) students without disabilities report social benefits from students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The primary social benefit outcomes include reductions of fear, hostility, prejudice, and discrimination, with increases in tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. However, other evidence suggests that high-ability peers also have negative perceptions about inclusive education. For example, Dare and Nowicki's (2019) study revealed that high-performing students would rather face the uncomfortable feelings of rejection by joining classes with older students rather than endure an inclusive class of their own age. The reason for this choice was that the students claimed within their inclusive classes they were not being challenged enough or receiving the evidence-based interventions needed (Dare & Nowicki, 2019) due to the time-constraint the educator had with assisting the students with disabilities. When non-disabled students hold negative attitudes about inclusion, it questions whether or not Bandura's (1970) theory of social learning can actually foster an environment where students can observe and model behavior.

Other areas of concern with student stakeholders include their own knowledge of diversity. Students' own understanding of diversity (race, ethnicity, and disabilities) is multifaceted and often complex, and this discrepancy tends to harbor feelings of exclusion (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014), which is opposite of the expectation of inclusion. Inclusion is thought to educate all children about the acceptance of differences. However, some instances have shown that integration of mainstream education has not disposed of exclusive practices, but rather drawn them more to the surface (Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014). When non-disabled students are placed in inclusive classrooms, they sometimes begin to harbor exclusive practices due to jealousy that their disabled peers are obtaining more attention than him or herself, and this can lead to bullying or a lack of relationship building between the students.

For the majority of adolescents, forming relationships with their peers develops naturally with no facilitation. However, students with severe disabilities often require assistance to improve their social participation and peer interactions (Sigstad, 2018) and this need for teacher-initiated interventions often results in exclusion from the students who lack disabilities. This exclusion is typically due to the vast differences in social and academic development between the students with disabilities and the students without disabilities.

Inclusion in Vocational Schools

The majority of research on inclusive education is done within traditional primary schools. Little is done in high schools, and very little is done in vocational high schools, which is optimal because the number of students who are pursuing their education in general education environments in scope of inclusive classes is increasing every year (Ozbek et al., 2017). These schools are uniquely designed to provide training in the trades and provide hands-on work experience that supports the transition of student into the workplace. Greater inclusion success,

defined as increased scores on assessments and increased peer-socialization, has been reported at the primary levels of education, than the secondary level of general education because the secondary level poses significant challenges such as (a) high-level pace and content; (b) high expectations and weak student study skills; (c) increased content area; and (d) increased demands for high-stakes testing (Casale-Giannola, 2012; Ozbek et al., 2017). These same challenges can be delegated to vocational schools.

Vocational schools, also called Career and Technical Education (CTE) or “*Voctech*”, provide opportunities for students to study and work on careers related to technology or vocational skills while the student pursues an academic high school diploma. Many families, when seeking the 12 years of education for their special needs child, prefer vocational high schools because their child can learn a functional skill that makes employment more attainable for students with disabilities (Hart et al., 2014; Hind et al., 2019). This does not mean that vocational education is not a continuum for students with disabilities. Many parents of children with disabilities want their child to obtain a vocational skill that they can use later in life rather than sending them off to a four-year university. Not only that, but it has been reported that vocational classrooms can benefit students with disabilities because they offer real-life connections, active-learning opportunities for students, and repetition (Casale-Giannola, 2012). In vocational schools students work on real-life projects, such as catering luncheons, or making shelves, and this offers students real-life connections.

When students make real-life connections, they end up with a sense of purpose and goal achievement, and with vocational instruction it helps students explore potential careers and interests (Ozbek et al., 2017). Vocational schools also offer active-learning opportunities like creating, discussing, and reflecting on skills and projects through student-centered approaches

which makes the learning process more meaningful to the students. The student-centered CTE instruction also provides longer class periods through the day with more opportunities to work on projects and thus utilize new skills and concepts effectively. It is this reason why the opinions of educators in vocational high schools are important to discover the perceived factors of successful inclusion implementation.

The unemployment among special needs students, particularly with learning disabilities, is high and it is believed that there is a correlation between students with high self-efficacy and skillfulness for employment (Ab Halim et al., 2019). There is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and the student's employability skills. It is this reason that many parents want their child with a disability to partake in vocational training (Ab Halim et al., 2019). Vocational education has shown to improve a student with disabilities' employability skills.

There is a significant relationship between students' career success and participation in a vocational program (Ab Halim et al., 2019). The more that a child participates within their vocational trade, the higher his or her self-efficacy will be, and ultimately the more likely he or she is to be employable. When students with disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, participate in a CTE concentration within an inclusive classroom, it has been shown that there is a 3- to 4- percentage increase in the likelihood of on-time graduation, and a 2.8- to 4.2- percentage point increase in employment (Theoblad et al., 2018), both of these positive outcomes highlight the potential benefits of inclusive vocational education. It is because of these relationships that studying vocational from a special needs standpoint is of importance.

A vocational high school is a facility that educates students within the normal curriculum academics, but also teaches students a skill or trade that will prepare them to work in a particular field after high school. Vocational schools offer training in trades such as carpentry, culinary

arts, electricity, automotive, automated machine technology, metal fabrication, information technology, computer automated drafting, business technology, cosmetology, and many more. Most vocational high schools allow students to graduate with a standard diploma along with the certification they need for their skill or trade.

Even though there is a high rate of students with disabilities within the CTE setting very few studies have been done in documenting vocational experience with inclusive education. Of the studies done, a few common areas for inclusive practices have been identified as either problematic or beneficial: the changing role of the special education needs (SEN) educator; the selectiveness of mainstream education; educator negativity and attitude; the accessibility of the physical environment; and student wellbeing (Adhikari et al., 2018; Casale-Giannola, 2012; Gashi & Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016; Ozbek et al., 2017; Pirttimaa & Hirvanen, 2016; Van Pragg et al., 2017). Similar to the studies done on inclusive education in general education public schools, the studies done on inclusive education in vocational schools also highlights that teacher attitude (negativity) and teacher efficacy can play detrimental roles.

Changing Role of the SEN Educator

With the incorporation of inclusive education into vocational training, support services have increased in degree of specializations. Special education needs educators are now being assigned new roles that demand different collaborative and professional skills (Eisenman et al., 2011). These new roles redefine their daily practices. Specifically, SEN educators now fit into two different roles: one that supports vocational education, and the other that is in general education (Pirttimaa & Hirvanen, 2016). This change in job assignment can cause strife for those educators not willing or not capable of accepting it.

The need for differing groups of support services is due to the fact that within vocational classes, different demands are set forth that are not seen in a general education classroom. Therefore, physical therapists, occupational therapists, SEN educators, social workers, and any other support staff needs to be aware of the exact demands and requirements within that trade (Pirttimaa & Hirvanen, 2016). These specialists need to not only understand how to modify and accommodate for general education, as seen when students are learning the theory of the trade or skill, but they also need to be knowledgeable of accommodations or modifications with the actual trade (Eisenman et al., 2011). This extra knowledge required by SEN educators and support staff can be detrimental in ensuring successful inclusion because if the educators are unaware of the demands of the trade or skill, then correct modifications or accommodations may not be given thus hindering the education process.

Selectiveness of Mainstream Education

Many trades or skills have physical or mental requirements that must be met in order to participate. For example, an individual would need two arms in order to hammer in a nail in carpentry. Physical accessibility and architectural barriers are key barriers and can affect the accessibility to education for many students with disabilities (Van Pragg et al., 2017).

Although vocational schools offer differentiated and active-learning experiences to students, the students still need the basic skills of reading, writing, math, and computer skills. For example, reading comprehension is critical for licensing exams in all vocations; mathematical measurement is critical in metal fabrication, carpentry, and culinary, while computer technology skills are needed in web design and business technology. Some students with moderate to severe disabilities lack these basic skills that vocations require and therefore the selectiveness of vocational schools leave little leeway for full inclusion (Casale-Giannola, 2012). Although, it is

the job of the IEP team to consider these factors when determining placement decisions for students with disabilities, many times that team may not fully understand that selectiveness of said vocation, and therefore cannot determine adequate accommodations (Casale-Giannola, 2012).

Vocational schools offer instruction not only in a trade, but also in academics. This means that CTE schools have increased content area instruction and expectations. Students are required to not only learn their typical academics in order to receive a diploma, but they also must learn their skill or trade in order to pass the required licensing examinations. So, students with weak skill sets in reading comprehension, math, or computer technology are often hindered by this selectiveness of vocational schools (Casale-Giannola, 2012).

This selectiveness of vocational education leaves little leeway for mainstream education, especially when education is fully inclusive. Thus, a general trend in vocational schools is that selectiveness that vocations demand are leaving educators to struggle with inclusive practices in their area (Van Pragg et al., 2017). Vocational educators are struggling with the ways to develop inclusive curricula or practices aimed at the actual content of their program. It is due to this selectiveness that some educators are deeming fully inclusive mainstream education an impractical dream (Van Pragg et al., 2017).

Educator Negativity and Attitude

With the struggle to incorporate students with disabilities into vocational shops, it is understandable that vocational educators would have a negative attitude towards inclusion. It has been discovered that educators at vocational high schools have more negative opinions concerning inclusive education compared to traditional high school educators (Ozbek et al., 2017). As seen in prior studies on inclusive education in general education, having a negative

attitude results in educators being unmotivated to improve their pedagogy (Pavitola, 2017). Even students report that when instructors are friendly and supportive with positive attitudes, then the students' learning is more successful (Adhikari, 2018).

The success of inclusive education is not strictly based upon the teachers' attitudes. A resulting study indicated that these negative attitudes and opinions, even in vocational educators, are due to a lack of self-efficacy, or confidence in teaching students with special needs (Casale-Giannola, 2012). That is, educators in vocational high schools feel that they lack the training required for teaching special education students. Educators within vocational high schools feel they lack the strategies for modifications, skills for behavior management, knowledge of laws, and knowledge of co-teaching required for inclusive education (Casale-Giannola, 2012).

Vocational educators also report that they lack the funding, time, and resources necessary to accommodate students with disabilities (Ozbek et al., 2017).

Teachers in CTE settings often enter the field of education through alternative means, like through career switcher programs that often get teachers into the classroom on provisional licensures with minimal training in the education field. CTE schools retain various specializations for individuals who enter into the teaching profession with different types of certification that includes career-switchers. The majority of CTE teachers (career-switchers) are former industrial-based practitioners who have had industrial experience from years of service in industries; however, they lack knowledge of various pedagogical approaches (Omar et al., 2018). Roughly 12% of CTE educators who are considered career switchers will leave the education profession after their first year and many cite the reason for their exit as being the lack of knowledge of pedagogy (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2015).

Vocational education, whether for a student with or without disabilities, is meant to make the student capable of being an integral part of a community. Education in general is meant to help students become integrated into their community, however vocational education is meant to give a student a skill or trade that allows he or she to incorporate into society (Ozbek, 2017). A teacher's self-efficacy for education of students with intellectual disabilities tends to be negatively associated with attitudes towards more community building (Reichenberg & Lofgren, 2019). This means that if an educator has a low self-efficacy for teaching students with intellectual disabilities, then that educator would in turn have a poor attitude about helping that student become part of the community.

For inclusion to be successful, educators need to be prepared and properly trained (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). Many educators feel that they lack the knowledge in working with learners with special needs (Casale-Giannola, 20120) and because of this deficit; they are unwilling to work with those students. Having educators trained on special education practices increases their confidence and self-efficacy, which can therefore make teachers more willing and acceptable to inclusive practices.

Many educators feel that full inclusion is placing too many demands on teachers (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020). These demands come from many sources. One source is from the teachers' lack of knowledge and support regarding inclusive education and thus feel being saddled. Additionally, if teachers do not know how to include learners with special needs in their classes, it could create a feeling of too many demands made on them. This over demanding presence attributes a negative attitude about inclusion.

Educator negativity can also harm the student's support and trust. Vocational educators often create more positive and meaningful teacher-student relationships because the student

remains with the instructors for longer periods of time over multiple years, and they tend to share specific career goals (Casale-Giannola, 20120). When an educator has a negative attitude, they can fail to form this relationship with the student, and ultimately those students with disabilities who require the support of the relationship can have long-term effects.

Accessibility of the Physical Environment

It is generally accepted that teacher attitudes impact a student's educational outcomes, particularly within inclusive classrooms. In a study documenting factors that influence educator attitudes, it was discovered that child-related variables was the strongest impact (Male, 2011). That is, educators were more accepting of children with mild physical disabilities, cautiously accepting of a child with learning disabilities, with behavior disorders having the most negative attitudes, which is probably due to the accessibility of the environment. These findings indicate that the more severe the disability, whether physical or intellectual, the more negative the attitude the educator holds for teaching the student.

In an environment where the selectiveness that vocations demand are leaving educators to struggle with finding and incorporating inclusive practices in their area (Van Pragg et al., 2017), it is fair to say that some of the vocational trades provide physical learning environments that are insufficiently accessible to students with disabilities (Adhikari, 2018). Adhirkari (2018) found that vocational educators discovered a difference in the degree of disability when concerned with the educational outcomes. Students who were physically disabled could understand the theory of the trade; but those with visual, hearing, or intellectual disabilities had a greater challenge in understanding the theory. Additionally, students with severe disabilities struggled with understanding the theory of trade and with the hands-on material (Male, 2011). This struggle of educational outcomes was not due to a lack of accommodations on the educator's part, but rather

on the accessibility of the environment (Adhirkari, 2018). Some trades or skills can only be modified and accommodated to a certain degree. Therefore, due to the severity of the disability, some trades are rather inaccessible (Adhirkari, 2018).

The vocational environment also creates a challenge to educators, especially with management. In a classroom filled with dangerous tools, such as carpentry, management is critical. In vocational classrooms, many hands-on activities are happening all at the same time, and many of these activities are occurring with tools that can be fatal if used improperly. This makes it difficult for the educator to manage and support students in multiple areas at once (Casale-Giannola, 2012). For students with disabilities who may require behavioral management or more one-on-one time, this creates a challenge for the educator with managing the class and being able to support the safety of all hands-on activities.

Student Well-Being

Another factor that influences the opinions of vocational educators on inclusion is the well-being of the students. The student's well-being is critical for learning motivation and effective learning, yet Gashi and Mojsoska-Blazevski (2016) found that the majority of special needs students have minimal motivation in vocational settings due to factors that are not controlled by educator. These factors include the student's experience with bullying, and their feeling of usefulness for their particular trade, often stemming from a history of school failure. When educators have students who are unwilling or unmotivated to learn, then the educators develop a negative experience culminating in a negative attitude.

Friendship has been deemed an important aspect of inclusion, yet it has been determined that physical inclusion does not necessarily lead to social inclusion (Adhikari, 2018). This lack of socialization and relationship bonding is detrimental to the student's wellbeing. Friendships

within a mainstream classroom are not formed to the desired degree due to three sub-themes: difficulty in socialization with peers, sympathetic friends, and ambivalent feelings from the instructors (Adhikari, 2018).

Within almost all-inclusive classrooms, regardless of whether it is general education or vocational education settings, the learners with disabilities are the minority within mainstream classrooms (Ozbek, 2017). Most children make friends and cliques based upon similarities. Yet, when a child is the minority within the class, it is difficult for them to form relationships based upon similarities, when there are little similarities, and it makes them more prone to bullying (Gashi & Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2016).

Some children with disabilities within mainstream education stated that their friends without disabilities tend to be overly sympathetic (Adhikari, 2018). Although sympathy and compassion are not negative attributes, it can be seen as that when those students without disabilities are being overly protective because of the disability in question. For example, when a student without disabilities overly compensates for their peers with disabilities it can result in students with disabilities feeling like they are not equal.

This same over-sympathetic attitude can be detrimental when it comes from the instructor as well. Educators act as models within the classroom. Their behaviors are often mimicked by the students. So, if an educator is accepting of a student's disability, then the peers without disabilities are often accepting as well (Male, 2011). This is also true when instructors over-compensate for a student's disability. If the instructor places more sympathy on the disability, then the other student's will as well this puts the student with the disability on an unequal field (Adhikari, 2018).

Summary

A large educational and political movement to move public education towards greater inclusion is has been occurring since 1975 but gained considerable momentum in the early 1990's. IDEA (2004) mandates a continuum of placements be considered with respect to the individual needs of the student, beginning with consideration of the general education setting. However, some districts to place these children in the LRE, however some districts, specifically the one being studied, opt to place children with disabilities in general education classrooms regardless of IDEA's additional mandate to apply the continuum of alternative placements where an IEP team considers the best options for delivering special education services. The success of inclusion in mainstream education is thought to be insurmountable. Many general education teachers report that their inclusive classroom is failing (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016) and it is because of this reason that there is a trend in studies analyzing the barriers to inclusion.

Current research on inclusive education comes within two criteria. Authorities either attempt to explain the failure of inclusive on the actions of the educators by applying Bandura's (1977) theory self-efficacy to the educator's perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs; or they advocate for the continuation of pull-out special education classes (e.g., Alnahdi, 2019; Jenson 2018; Zee & Koomen, 2016). It is hypothesized that due to the negative attitudes of the general education teachers about teaching in an inclusive classroom, the resulting behavior is also negative, which leads to the unsuccessful classroom (Jenson, 2018). If a general education teacher has a negative perception about inclusion, then their behavior will be poor, and their methodology for pedagogy will be poor. Current research is aimed at discovering ways to alleviate the negative teacher attitudes by improving teacher self-efficacy (Block et al., 2018).

Few researchers documented whether there are other barriers to inclusion or not, such as environmental factors, and the stakeholder's perceptions, but no studies seemed to highlight methods for fixing these flaws, nor delve deeper into their causes. Few studies examined the factors influencing teacher attitudes toward inclusion in the secondary level, with a gap in vocational education settings. Attitudes, even teacher attitudes, can be impacted by their surroundings, including their environments, which can ultimately impact their behavior, or instructional method.

Regardless of the cause of the failing fully inclusive classroom, there is current research that suggests the end of special education and the inclusion of all students in a common curriculum and site of hypothetical world built by philosophical constructions and science fictions, that is inconsistent with real-world limitations (Kauffman & Horny, 2020). Scientific evidence has consistently shown that that most effective instruction for special education should provide skill-based instruction, which supports the placement of students in vocational schools, yet educational governments fail to provide details on how this can be done with a fully inclusive classroom (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Some authorities in the field of special education claim that inclusion, in the sense of students being physically present in general education, is not considered as important as inclusion in the reality of being engaged in a program of instruction that is meaningful and challenging (e.g., Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

The majority of current literature, whether it is highlighting the causes of failing or successful inclusive classrooms, or vying for the disablement of full inclusion, is aimed at identifying the barriers of inclusion within a traditional general education schools that lack CTE. Very few studies consider the need to delve into vocational schools. Many students with disabilities are attending vocational high schools so that they can learn a skill or trade that will

prepare them for employment after high school (Casale-Giannola, 2012). Children with disabilities who attend a vocational trade have higher self-efficacy and are more employable (Ab Halim et al., 2019). Therefore, research from a special education standpoint within vocational schools, is beneficial in helping foster and create community members from students with disabilities.

Following within the laws and regulations, these vocational high schools must seek inclusive classrooms and shops. Yet, these high schools are rarely studied. What has been studied and documented, is that the majority of educators within vocational high schools have negative opinions of inclusion (Ozbek et al., 2017). These negative opinions are similar to that of general educators in that educators have a low self-efficacy, they have minimal training in inclusion and special education (Casale-Giannola, 2012), and their classroom environments are harboring negative experiences for them which culminates into a negative attitude, meaning the educational and vocational training of students with disabilities is not being maximized. It is important to study this area of environmental barriers within vocational high schools in order to eliminate all possible and probable barriers that prevent students from learning most optimally in an inclusive vocational classroom.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The aim is to discover what perceived factors and facilitators may be potentially associated with the experiences in the inclusive classroom for general vocational education teachers at McMuffin Technical School (pseudonym) that may affect their self-efficacy and ultimately their ability to teach to inclusive classrooms. In addition, this study seeks insight into how much confidence or self-efficacy general education teachers in vocational classrooms have in effectively supporting students with disabilities in their classrooms. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to investigate rural general education vocational teachers' lived experiences that shape or affect their instructional self-efficacy with students with disabilities in inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts.

The nature of this study is to collect participants' descriptions/explanations of what their experiences are, how they experienced it, and what meaning or essence they give to the nature of the perceived failing or successful inclusive classrooms. In order to describe vocational teachers' experiences in the inclusive classroom, a transcendental phenomenological approach will be taken. This study's approach will provide an opportunity to collect data from teachers concerning the factors influencing the self-efficacy of educators teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive vocational setting.

Design

The planned method of study will be qualitative in nature, which is an inductive approach for studying natural phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative researchers collect data in

natural settings, and then induce or deduce patterns or themes within that data. This type of study is appropriate because the intent of the study is to deduce the themes associated with the phenomenon of teachers' experiences with inclusive vocational classrooms. Qualitative research is done when a problem needs to be explored within the natural environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this circumstance the problem to be explored is the factors influencing the meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities in vocational settings.

Transcendental phenomenological inquiry will be the approach used in this study to investigate the lived experiences of general education teachers teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive vocational setting. A phenomenological study describes a common meaning for several individuals from their lived experiences. The point of a phenomenological study is for the researcher to describe what the participants have in common as the participants experience a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological research sometimes may overlap with other qualitative approaches, but pure phenomenological research seeks to describe rather than explain. The research design draws heavily on Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and those who expanded his views, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These collective philosophers contributed to the development of phenomenology by highlighting the different philosophical assumptions used today (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These philosophical assumptions are based upon studying lived experiences, the view that the shared experiences are conscious ones, and describing the experiences. This form of research design was chosen for the study in question because the purpose of the research is to describe the shared experiences of educators who are experiencing a failing inclusive classroom.

Specifically, the type of phenomenology to be utilized is transcendental (Moustakas, 1994). This type of phenomenological design is based upon describing the texts of the lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This specific research design is based upon reducing the lived experiences into specific themes. For the current study, this research design is preferred since the hermeneutical phenomenology is more about interpreting participants' experiences, rather than describing of individuals' lived experiences.

Transcendental phenomenology is most fitting for this planned research study because unlike other form of phenomenological approaches, this form focuses less on the researcher's interpretation, or biases, and more on describing the experiences of the participants; moreover, it prescribes procedures for minimizing researcher biases and assumptions. This is important since strong feelings on the topic need to be suspended, made possible by using Moustakas' (1994) approach to bracketing and epoche. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical qualitative approach that seeks to understand human experience. The research design, largely developed by Husserl, is grounded, and conditioned upon setting aside all preconceived notions, or epochs, in order to see the phenomena clearly (Moustakas, 1994). If the phenomena can be clearly seen through unclouded lenses, then the true meaning of the phenomena can come to light within its own identity. Therefore, the crux of transcendental phenomenology is to look at things openly, and undisturbed by the natural world so that they can be described as they are and understand their meanings.

In this case I will attempt to view the experiences of teachers with inclusion in vocational schools through unclouded lenses, minimizing bias, and attempting to develop the textural and structural themes related to the educator's perceived environmental factors influencing inclusive education in a vocational school. To ensure that potential biases are put aside, peer review by my

committee chair and second member will help with the process of reflexivity whereby personal beliefs, judgments, practices are documented and examined in the course of conducting the research, data collection, and data analysis.

There will be an attempt to mitigate presuppositions by utilizing a semi-structured interview which are in-depth interviews using focusing types of questions where participants will have to answer preset open-ended questions developed in advance of the study (Jamshed, 2014). Using this type of interviewing approach will provide an opportunity to probe interesting ideas or comments made by the participant for further information, which will increase the likelihood that broad as well as deep coverage of issues is achieved. After acknowledging that one's own interpretations may influence data analysis, specific measures to enhance trustworthiness of the data will be introduced. Results will be peer reviewed and will also be returned to the participants for validation and give them the chance to ascertain if their answers to the questions need to be rectified.

Research Questions

The research questions for this transcendental phenomenological study include:

RQ1: What are the experiences that shape self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

RQ2: What prior experiences shape the self-efficacy of general education teachers working with students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational settings in Massachusetts?

RQ3: How do individual factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

RQ4: How do current school environmental factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts?

Setting

McMuffin Technical School is a medium-sized technical school located in rural Western Massachusetts (i.e., attending students live in the countryside rather than the city). The overall student population is 507 students within grades 9-12. Roughly 95.1% of the students identify as Caucasian, 1.4% identify as Hispanic, 0.6% identify as African American, 0.4% identify as Asian, and 2.6% identify as non-Hispanic/multi-racial. The student body is 36.6% female and 63.4% male.

There are 64 full-time faculty members, 40 of them are educators. There are 24 general education teachers, five special education teachers, and 11 vocational teachers. Of the 40 educators, 30 have a professional teaching license in the state of Massachusetts, five have an initial license in Massachusetts, three have a temporary license in Massachusetts, and two have a temporary license.

There are three administrators at McMuffin Technical School. The Principal and Vice Principal both identify as Caucasian males. They both have initial administrator licenses within the state of Massachusetts. The Principal was a high school English teacher for six years prior to entering administration. The Vice Principal was a high school science teacher for 15 years prior to entering administration. The third administrator identifies as a Caucasian female and holds the title as Student Coordinator.

Students at McMuffin Technical School spend every other week in academic classes, and the in-between weeks in their selected vocations. The school promotes itself on being fully inclusive. School records indicate that currently there are 90 (17.6%) students with disabilities and 225 (44.4%) who are regarded as *high needs*. High needs students are those who may belong to multiple selected populations and may struggle with academics. These student populations can range from being low income/poor, English Language Learners, or having an IDEA-related disability. Of these high needs students, nine (11%) have a health or orthopedic impairment, three (3.33%) are deaf or hard of hearing, five (5.55%) have Autism Spectrum Disorder, with the remaining students (80%) have either an intellectual or specific learning disability. The average class size at the school is 13.7 students per teacher, however the class sizes range from eight to 29 students.

This site is selected for the study because it boasts as being fully inclusive, which is the first criteria for studying classroom inclusivity. The school accommodates all students within their general education classrooms and does not use pull-out (i.e., resource or self-contained) rooms. There are quite a few teachers with a shared experience of inclusive classrooms that can be utilized from this institution. This site is also being selected because it is a public vocational school.

Participants

The 40 faculty members at McMuffin Technical School will comprise the sample population. There are 24 general education teachers, five special education teachers, and 11 vocational teachers. All educators identify as Caucasian with 37.5% identifying as female and 62.5% as male. Of the 40 educators, 30 have a professional teaching license in the state of Massachusetts, five have an initial license in Massachusetts, and five have a temporary license in

Massachusetts. Ten of the educators are aged 26-32, seven are between ages 33-40, and 20 are between ages 41-56, and three are over 56 years of age.

Criterion-based purposive sampling will be used to recruit between 15 and 18 participants from the population of 40 educators at the vocational school. A blanket recruitment email will be sent out using eligibility inclusion criteria stating that in order to qualify, an educator must currently teach to an inclusive classroom. These emails are accessible on the school's website. Although a typical response rate is 30% (Gall et al., 2007), the confidence for obtaining 15 participants from the sample is great. Approval from district authorities and site-permission from the administration will be garnered through an official letter prior to the study. This purposive sampling strategy helps to ensure that all of the individuals studied have experienced the same phenomenon related to the problem under investigation in this study. Maximum variation within this sample will be sought, specifically looking for a diverse as sample as possible from the population. This will result in fewer limitations and increase transferability of findings in the end. Purposive criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance within the phenomenological study in order to obtain a sample size of between 10-15 participants, with the minimum being 10.

Procedures

The first step in conducting this study is to obtain an approval by the chosen site. A letter of approval from the school administration or an individual with the authority to approve external research, such as the superintendent, will be garnered. Site-permission from the administration will also be obtained. From there, approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be obtained. This begins with approval by the Research Director and leads to defending the proposal. Once the IRB approves the proposal, the participant recruitment can begin.

Recruitment of sample criteria involves inviting individuals from the participant pool to participate in the study. The specific criterion is that the educator needs to have at least one full year of instructional experience in the CTE inclusive classroom environment. A blanket recruitment email will be sent out from my Liberty University account inviting individuals to participate. Faculty emails from the institution can be found on their website. In the list of eligibility requirements, it will state that only those who instruct in an inclusive environment will be recruited. The first 10 to 15 who respond will be recruited and then be asked to read and sign an informed consent form.

Through three different methods data will be gathered. Teacher surveys measuring self-efficacy will be given first. The surveys will be aligned with the study's objectives and will act as an important tool for triangulating the measurement of the phenomenon. The questions on the survey will be unbiased, understandable, and in a length that is suitable for the participant in order to maximize the usefulness of the data collection. The survey will be distributed to the teachers a week before interviews begin. By providing the teachers with an extended time-frame for the survey, it offers participants time to ask questions regarding the survey. If the participants fail to complete the survey prior to the interview, the schedule will be rearranged so that they will have the time and opportunity to complete the survey prior to the interview.

Personal interviews will be second and will be conducted offsite at a local university, in a library conference room to protect the privacy of the participants. These interviews will serve to offer participants an opportunity to articulate their thoughts on what experiences they feel shape self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The face-to-face interviews will offer participants a chance to explain what prior experiences may have shaped their own perceptions of self-efficacy towards working with

students with disabilities. Face-to-face conferencing, such as Zoom or Google Meet, will be an option to account for comfort level with the current pandemic. It will also offer participants the chance to articulate what factors they feel may influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities.

Focus-group interviews will follow and will be conducted with the educators at the same University library as the interviews took place, or if scheduling/logistical problems occur, conducting it through a web-conferencing system like Zoom. The participants will be reminded to keep details from the study confidential, but that I cannot guarantee that another participant will not share details about information/conversations outside of the focus group activity. They will be informed that if they do not want to respond to a question, then they do not have to. Two focus groups will be done to provide three sets of data for triangulation. The focus groups will be purposefully heterogeneous groups based on subject of academic or vocation and contain five to six individuals. I will then lead the group in open-ended questions designed to understand how the current school environmental and internal factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In order to keep a record of and ensure accuracy of the information, all interviews will be audio recorded.

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher conducting the study, it is imperative to mention the potential bias that could impact the study. I have been a general education teacher for the past ten years. I have taught all levels of class from special education to college prep, honors, advanced placement, and to inclusive classrooms. I have worked in a vocational school in Massachusetts for the past 10 years, and therefore may hold a bias towards the benefits of a vocational education. My view of

inclusion is drastically beneficially as long as a continuum of services is maintained. Specifically speaking, I am an educator that accepts inclusive education as long as IDEA's continuum of services is still considered/used to provide an appropriate education and as long as educators are properly trained to instruct students with disabilities. To avoid this bias from impacting the data certain tasks will be done to alleviate the potential impact. The tasks will include keeping detailed records during the study, incorporating all data into the report and acknowledging any expectations I may have had that were confirmed or contradicted, and acknowledging my limitation by being candid about any issues that may have affected the study. I have worked in an inclusive classroom for the past 10 years and therefore, I have a background in successful and unsuccessful inclusive classes. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I will be suspending my judgments by journaling and ensuring that my experiences are bracketed.

Data Collection

Phenomenological studies collect data primarily from interviews with individuals with data collected from between 5-25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews are based upon generalized, open-ended questions. To triangulate the data, a survey will be given to participants, participants will undergo face-to-face interview, and then a focus group will be conducted for further in-depth questioning about experiences.

Self-Efficacy Surveys

The first method of data collection will be the use of an adapted *Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices* (TEIP) scale developed by Sharma et al. (2011). The original scale was created to measure perceived levels of teacher efficacy toward inclusive educational practices. The 18-item Likert ordinal/rank scale was developed from a sample of 607 pre-service teachers and the results of the scale were analyzed and resulted in three specific factors: efficacy in using

inclusive instruction (6 questions), efficacy in collaboration (6 questions), and efficacy in managing disruptive behaviors (6 questions). The TEIP measures attitudes and perceptions of educators within those three factors of efficacy by placing numerical values to attitudes. A response of 1 indicates “strongly agree” while a response of 6 indicates “strongly disagree”. To score this measure, numbers are summed based on responses. The summed scores range from a floor of 18 to a ceiling of 108, with higher scores being indicative of higher self-efficacy for inclusive practices and lower scores indicative of lower self-efficacy. Cronbach alpha coefficients for internal consistency reliability coefficients were found to be high at .89 for the entire survey scale, and .88, .90, and .86 for the three efficacy sub-factors/scales, respectively. The TEIP’s three-factor structure is also supported by both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (Cardona-Molto et al., 2020; Tanriverdi & Ozokcu, 2018). Presently, there is no technical adequacy evidence for test-retest and/or interrater reliability or for predictive and/or concurrent validity.

Since this is a qualitative study, the response format of the TEIP will be modified to fit the qualitative nature of the current study. Each person will be given the TEIP (see Appendix A) and will be scored through a descriptive statistics. These scores will be discussed with the participants when they are interviewed by noting any outliers, unusual, or different responses. The TEIP will be given to each teacher to complete at the time they give consent to participate in the study; the instrument will be collected and scored before the scheduled interview. Item response patterns observed on the TEIP (e.g., high number of “strongly disagree” or “strongly agree” responses in a domain) may be used as an opportunity for follow-up questions during the one-on-one interview and/or the focus group and will be noted/discussed in the results section of the dissertation. Teacher responses on the TEIP will provide insight about their confidence level

in (a) using instructional practices that help students with disabilities learn successfully, (b) collaborating with other teachers, and (c) managing behavior. Individual and collective (i.e., total sample) descriptive statistical summarizations of responses on the TEIP will provide an objective means for documenting/describing individual participant and sample characteristics related to self-efficacy with inclusive practices and whether subjective interview and focus group data seem validated/aligned with what TEIP data suggest about their self-efficacy. When each participant completes the TEIP, survey items will be scored and responses to items/domains will be visually examined for any unusual or highly variable patterns of responding. For example, rating individual or clusters of items as “Strongly Disagree” or “Strongly Agree” or rating a whole domain as “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” or “Strongly Agree/Agree”, even rating a lot of items as “Not Sure”, would lead to further interview questions concerning the rationale for their responses to those items.

Interviews

The second method of data collection will be personal interviews. Personal interviews offer an opportunity for the researcher to understand the participant’s point of view in an attempt unfolds their experiences and explain them as perceived (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Personal interviews will be conducted in-person on site and with a recording device. To ensure confidentiality, these interviews will not be conducted during work hours and will be conducted offsite. The interview data will be transcribed through a reputable online company called Transcription Star. The following open-response questions will be asked:

1. Please introduce yourself and share why you chose to become an educator. (RQ1)
2. What indicates a successful inclusive classroom to you? (RQ1)
3. What prior training have you had in teaching to inclusive classrooms? (RQ2)

4. What prior teaching experiences or second-hand learning experiences (e.g., through observing or reading about others' experiences) have you had with inclusive education? (RQ2)
5. How are students with educational needs included as full participants in your facility? (RQ4)
6. What types of resources or supports are available for your inclusive classroom? (RQ4)
7. What supports do you think are needed for your inclusive classroom? How often are they given? (RQ4)
8. What is your class size and the range/characteristics of the students with disabilities in your inclusive classroom? (RQ1).
9. Which environmental factors (e.g., school norms/climate/expectations, materials/resources, collegial/administrative support, etc.), do you think make teaching in an inclusive classrooms harder or easier? (RQ4)
10. How has your confidence level for teaching to inclusive classrooms changed since you began teaching to inclusive classrooms? What factors or specific experiences helped influence any changes to your current confidence level? (RQ3)
11. What positive experiences and advice would you share/give to teachers about working with students with disabilities in an inclusive setting? (RQ3)
12. What cautionary advice would you give to teachers about teaching in an inclusive classroom setting? (RQ3)
13. What are your thoughts about the field of education's desire to fully include *all* students with disabilities into the general classroom versus IDEA's requirement to maintain a diversity/continuum of placement options to address a diversity of knowledge and skills? (RQ3)

14. When faced with a behavior or instructional problem in your classroom, how do you deal with it? Are you confident in seeking out technical assistance from colleagues or do you attempt to solve it on your own because you do not want to be perceived as an ineffective teacher? (RQ3)

15. When first placed in an inclusive classroom, what did you do to prepare and what advice do you have for new teachers in this setting? (RQ3)

16. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me pertaining to teaching in an inclusive classroom environment?

Question 1 is meant to be a straightforward question to develop a rapport. It is meant to also remind me to conduct the data analysis for identifying demographics. Question 2 is meant to determine what baseline educators are using to determine if inclusion was successful or not. The question is meant to discover whether educators determine success based upon academic grades (Jenson, 2018), or on social developments (Cochrane, 2016).

Questions 3 and 4 are meant to discern what training or experiences the educator has had to shape their self-efficacy (Livers et al., 2019). These questions seek to understand what perceived shared experiences may impact the perceived self-efficacy of the instructors.

Questions 5 through 9 are meant for the participants to reflect on their own classrooms. It is meant for the educators to identify what their specific inclusive classrooms entail, and to compare their rationales to their newly found knowledge of their colleague's experiences (Poon et al., 2016).

Questions 10 through 14 are meant to discern what the attitudes of the educators are in relation to mainstream education. These questions are meant to understand if the educators have an external locus control and fixed mindset. That is, the questions are meant to explore whether

or not the participants possess traits of internal locus control like resiliency and perseverance, or if the educators seek failure as a weakness and blame others for it. The questions seek to discover if the educators have an internal locus control which correlates with a higher self-efficacy (Pearman et al., 2021).

Focus Groups

The third method for data collection will be conducting focus group interviews aimed at investigating participants' perceived past and vicarious experiences. Focus-group interviews are done to explore a multi-faceted phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is done by splitting the participants into small groups, and then asking open-ended questions to the groups. The participants will be notified that there are no correct or incorrect answers, and that their answers will be recorded. The reason for conducting the focus-group interviews is that by talking about inclusive classrooms, the educators will offer alternate thoughts or processes that their peers may not have considered prior.

Focus groups are considered controversial by some qualitative researchers when used in phenomenological studies while other authorities have no issue with it (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009; Palmer et al., 2010). However, focus groups can be quite useful when credibility, transferability, and dependability are maintained by the study's design (Shenton, 2004). Focus groups allow for the participants to elaborate on and share issues raised within the study (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009), which provides an environment that encourages interaction and clarification in which individual lived experience can be preserved within a group context to provide rich experiential data (Palmer et al., 2010). The projected open-ended focus group questions for this study are meant to allow participants to hear the ideas of others, which will help them to formulate their own opinions (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009) and this will help the

participants elaborate their own views in response to encouragement. The focus group questions for this study include:

1. Please share how you came to be a teacher here at this Career and Technical Vocational school. (RQ1)
2. What assessment/observation methods could be used to objectively measure the success of an inclusive classroom? (RQ1)
3. Who feels they have a strong or high level of confidence in teaching to inclusive classrooms, and why do you think that is? (RQ2)
4. How has your training in inclusive classrooms differed or varied from your colleagues and from these differences, which training experiences do you think are the most beneficial? (RQ3)
5. What common academic supports are found within the group's inclusive classrooms and from these supports which ones do you most need or least need? (RQ4)
6. Do you think inclusive education has effectively (or nearly) closed the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel that, in the process of promoting inclusive education, we may have underestimated the severity of the learning problems of students with disabilities. What are your thoughts on this as a possibility?
8. Do you feel that, in the process of promoting inclusive education, we may have overestimated our instructional capacity to address the learning needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. What are your thoughts on this as a possibility?
9. In your opinion and experience, what are the most impactful environmental factors/strategies (e.g., student's social peer network, collegial and administrative support,

professional materials/training) for promoting the success of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom? (RQ4)

10. In your opinion and experience, what are the least impactful environmental factors/strategies (e.g., student's social peer network, collegial and administrative support, professional materials/training) for promoting the success of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom? (RQ4)

Question 1 is meant to be a straightforward question to develop a rapport. It is meant to also remind me about reporting the demographics of my sample. Question 2 is meant to determine what baseline educators are using to determine if inclusion was successful or not. The question is meant to discover whether educators determine success based upon academic grades (Jenson, 2018), or on social developments (Cochrane, 2016).

Questions 3 is meant for the participants to reflect on their own classrooms and confidence levels in regard to their colleagues. It is meant to identify what their specific inclusive classrooms are like and compare their confidences for teaching inclusive classrooms in regard to their colleagues (Poon et al., 2016).

Question 4 is meant to determine how the training and education of general educators in inclusive classrooms differs. It is meant to determine what specific training educators deem worthy or beneficial (Jenson, 2018). It is also meant to determine whether or not the training of educators, when compared to question three, has helped them with inclusive education.

Question 5 is meant to determine what similarities the inclusive classrooms have in common to help determine the phenomenon being studied. By identifying which supports are within the classroom, it can help determine which supports are enabling successful inclusive classrooms and which supports are not (Grant & Jones-Goods, 2016).

Question 6 is meant to investigate what participants perceptions are about the approach and climate of inclusive education in public schools and whether they feel it is has made a difference in helping students with disabilities make measurable progress on IEP goals.

Questions 7 and 8 are similar in that they are meant to get participants to think beyond local inclusive education issues at the school to the profession at large. These questions are important in order understand what classroom-based teachers' perceptions are about impact on student learning and see how it aligns with researchers' concerns about current outcomes for students with disabilities in inclusive education settings (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2015).

Questions 9 and 10 are designed to gain insight into what instructional/environmental factors or supports were effective or not effective when working with students with disabilities. Providing these insights and experiences may help other teachers in the focus group learn vicariously from their peers what to do and what to avoid doing. The shared information may improve the attitudes and behavior of teachers towards working with students with challenging learning problems (McFarlane & Woolfson, 2013).

Data Analysis

The data analysis for the study will be following that of a typical transcendental phenomenological study as described by Moustakas (1994) and modified by Stevick and colleagues (2016). The survey will provide a needed objective check to balance out the limitations of subjective and anecdotal word data and also to use individual participants' responses on the instrument as a means to ask important follow-up questions for clarification and understanding. In terms of analysis of the survey data, inferential statistics will not be used, but rather the results will be reported as patterns using descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, mode, and range. The incorporation of the scale through descriptive statistics

will be used for comparison purposes during the triangulation process. This will help identify frequencies, percentages, and measures of variations to characterize demographic data and the overall teaching efficacy and attitude scores gathered from the TEIP. The researcher will compare the descriptive data presented from the scale to the perceptions given during the interviews and the focus groups. This can help the researcher see if alignments exist between aggregate responses to the TEIPS statement and participants' responses to the interview questions. Concerning analysis of responses on the TEIP, the study sample's frequency and percent of "agree" and "disagree" data for each item (grouped by domain) will be calculated and reported narratively as well as presented in objective format in Table/Figures to provide additional insight and perspective into teachers' confidence about using inclusive instruction, engaging in collaboration, and in managing disruptive behaviors.

Similar steps for analysis will be utilized for the interviews, and focus group data collection methods. I will begin by creating an *epoche* in which my preconceived judgments, perceptions, and ideas will be set aside (Moustakas, 1994). With bias aside, *epoche* will be accomplished through journaling and bracketing of the researcher's experiences prior to and throughout the research process. After bracketing, the next step of data analysis is the identification of significant statements first, followed by horizontalization. In this process every statement will be treated as if equal and significant statements will be identified to explain how participants experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, each interview transcript will be printed out, read, and highlighted from specific terms or statements, a process referred to as coding. Coding of interviews will be done through an ontological approach. This approach captures the participant's perceived realities and lived experiences. Coding is cyclical and is composed of different cycles. The first cycle, or sorting, will be done through

simultaneous coding methods of *in vivo* and value coding. With *in vivo coding*, the researcher uses the participants' own language (Saldana, 2016), while *value coding* seeks out the participant's attitudes and beliefs. The second cycle of coding, or category development, will use pattern coding which seeks out similarities, differences, and frequencies (Saldana, 2016). The final round of coding will focus on thematic analysis.

The highlighted statements from horizontalization will be tested against the requirements listed by Moustakas (1994) for reduction and elimination to determine any invariant constituents (Luo & Murray, 2018). Moustakas (1994) suggested testing if each statement contains a moment of the experience that is necessary to understand the experience and testing whether or not it is possible to abstract and label the statement (Frizzell et al., 2016), because if so, it will be considered an invariant constituent. This process described by Moustakas (1994) will be followed, and the invariant constituents will be analyzed as data. Statements that are vague or repetitive will be eliminated. This process will leave me with "horizons", or the textural meanings of the phenomenon.

The horizons will assist in developing clusters of meanings or themes. From these themes and clusters, the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon can be deduced. Textural descriptions refer to the thoughts, feelings, examples, and situations that comprise the experience being studied, while structural descriptions are the process of what was experienced, such as time, space, relationships, or intentions (Frizzell et al., 2016). The structural descriptions will be created through imaginative variation, which is when the textural themes are placed into structures where various possibilities of space, causality, and relationship to self are explored by the researchers (Moustakas, 1994). This process will be done for each participant and then the textural and structural descriptions will be combined to develop a composite description

describing the *essence* of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). A qualitative software data analysis tool such as NVivo will be used to store, organize, and aid in the thematic analysis of the data.

Trustworthiness

In research, trustworthiness indicates that the research being presented is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. This means that the researcher provides a thorough description of the study with detailed description to demonstrate that the study can be replicated and that findings are authentic and valid. This indicates that an audit trail, triangulation, or member checks have been conducted to demonstrate the honesty and reliability of the study. The following methods will be conducted to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility

Within qualitative research, credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to demonstrate credibility a few steps will be taken. The first is that throughout the study, reflexive journaling will be done. This journaling activity also includes comprehensive field notes along with audio files with verbatim transcription. Epoche, which refers to setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence, will be applied. Reflexive journaling will allow me to make regular entries during the research process. In these entries, the researcher will record methodological decisions and the reasons for them, the logistics of the study, and reflect upon what is happening in terms of her own values and interests. To ensure credibility other endeavors will also be undertaken. These include triangulation of data, member checking (or having the participants read and approve the transcripts and analysis of the study's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All of these

extra steps in the study will help increase confidence that the findings are derived from the data and are credible.

Credibility of focus groups and individual interviews will be addressed with several endeavors. The first step involves developing a familiarity with the culture of the participating organization by creating a prolonged relationship (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln, 1985). Both of these acts will help establish a relationship of trust.

Within the study triangulation to involve the use of different methods will be utilized to ensure credibility. The two methods chosen, individual interviews and focus groups, both have methodological shortcomings since both are interviews (Shenton, 2004), however the use of both of them together compensates for their individual limitation and exploits their benefits (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Guba, 1981). To ensure unknown influences are not occurring within the interviews and focus groups, purposeful sampling will be done to ensure that those participants selected are representative of the larger group (Preece, 1994). To ensure honesty from these purposefully selected participants, each person will be prompted at the start of the interviews (or focus group) to be as honest and open as they can in answering the question(s) but if they feel uncomfortable with the question, they are free to decline giving a response. This will help develop credibility by ensuring that data collection sessions involve only those willing to respond to the questions and share their experiences. All of the participants that are willing to participate in the study will also be asked to read and approve any transcript of dialogue that they partook in. This form of member checking will ensure credibility within phenomenological studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is the stability of data over time and over differing conditions, while conformability is the knowledge that the participant's data are not that of the researcher's bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To increase dependability and confirmability, a careful documentation and audit trail will be constructed throughout the journey. That is every single survey, interview, or analysis session will be documented along with a detailed log of researcher actions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that there are close ties between credibility and dependability, so if you can demonstrate credibility, then you can ensure dependability. By using overlapping methods, like focus groups and individual interviews together can ensure dependability. This also includes triangulation, member checking, inquiry audits, and peer reviews will be done on both overlapping methods. All of these processes will ensure that the data is that of the participants and not mine.

Transferability

Transferability is another aspect of trustworthiness that will be met. It is the extent of which the findings of the study are applicable to other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to ensure transferability, comprehensive field notes will be taken. The field notes will allow other researchers to correctly recreate the settings in which the phenomenon occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability will also be enhanced by providing vivid descriptions of the context for the study, the participants, and the findings. By offering these descriptions, it offers the opportunity for the reader to evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts. In order to ensure that a maximum variation in the sample (diversity in gender, grades taught, subjects, level of experience, certification, etc.) is taken, purposive sampling will be done.

Since qualitative studies are specific to a small number of environments it is hard to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable. However, it is important to remember that even though the study being done is small and unique small groups can also be an example within a larger group (Denscombe, 1998). Also, Bassey (1981) stated that if practitioners believe their situations are similar to that described in the study, then they may relate the findings to their own. Therefore, although transferability of this small study may seem impossible the extensive field notes with vivid descriptions will ensure that practitioners on a larger scale can apply the conclusions to their study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical research is critical to a qualitative study. Researchers must take every precaution in order to avoid exposing participants to harmful situations. Therefore, the role of the researcher is to maintain the participant's privacy, and ensure they are not harmed in any way physically or emotionally. For this study, the first ethical consideration is protection of the participants. To ensure protection, participants will receive written and verbal information regarding the objective content of the study. The study participation will be voluntary, and the participants will be told and allowed to withdraw at any time. If the participants show any sign of distress during the study, then I will stop the interview at any time and ask the participant if they would like to continue at a later time. If participants decline to continue, then they can withdraw from the study.

Since I will know who volunteered and will be able to connect their personal identities to their raw data, anonymity cannot be offered or promised in the study; instead, procedures to safeguard confidentiality will be put into place to prevent non-participants from knowing who volunteered and to protect the data collection and storage procedures. Pseudonyms will be

assigned to sites and participants to avoid disclosing information that could harm the participants. Composite participant profiles will be created to mask situations where data may be identifiable. Identifying codes/pseudonyms will be kept on a separate document from the actual raw data. Although conducting focus groups is inimical to ensuring confidentiality, all privacy and confidentiality risks will be discussed with the participants verbally and on consent forms. At the start of each focus group participants will be asked not to share or disclose anything mentioned within the study and to respect the confidentiality of their peers and colleagues. Participants will be told that although I can respect the confidentiality of all of the information, there is no assurance other participants in the focus groups will share details to others outside of the study.

Finally, to not only ensure participant protection, but also data protection, all written data will be stored in locked cabinet, and all electronic data will be protected with a password. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years and will be destroyed. All paper data will be destroyed by shredding. Computerized data will be destroyed by reformatting, and audiotapes will be pulverized.

Summary

In order to investigate public vocational schoolteachers' experiences and perceived self-efficacy in working with students with disabilities in an inclusive setting, between 15-18 educators (with 15 being the minimum) from a high school in western Massachusetts will be recruited and asked to complete the TEIP survey instrument as well as participate in focus-group and one-on-one interviews. These 10 – 15 participants will be selected through a criterion-based purposive sampling process. From a carefully constructed set of personal and focus-group interview questions designed to answer the study's four overarching research questions, the data

will be coded and analyzed by developing textural and structural descriptions derived from significant statements, and then integrating to develop a description of essence of the phenomenon. A qualitative data analysis software known as NVivo will be used to organize, analyze and find insights in the unstructured, qualitative interview data. To ensure trustworthiness of the study a variety of strategies will be undertaken to strengthen the study's credibility, transferability, and dependability. To protect the participants and the data, processes to ensure confidentiality and locked data will be utilized.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences that shaped the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The aim was to discover (a) what perceived factors and facilitators may be potentially associated with the experiences in the inclusive classroom for general vocational education teachers at McMuffin Technical School (pseudonym); and (b) affect their self-efficacy and ultimately their ability to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In addition, this study sought insight into the confidence or self-efficacy of general education teachers in vocational classrooms when it comes to effectively supporting students with disabilities in their classrooms. A phenomenological approach was taken because phenomenology provides rich, descriptive data that is needed to fully describe the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals. The findings that follow are a synthesized analysis of the participants' voices using a survey, interviews, and focus groups.

This chapter includes an overview of the research questions and a brief introduction to each of the participants. From there, the descriptive data obtained from the TEIPS is described as a means of noting similarities in how study participants perceived their self-efficacy in inclusive environments to comments made during their interviews and the focus group. Then, the themes that were extrapolated from the significant statements are presented and supported through the words of the participants are described. Lastly, the research questions that drove this study are answered.

Participants

In total, there were 15 participants for this study. Invitations went out to 40 educators at the facility in a blanket email. All participants were vocational educators for at least one full year in their current inclusive classroom. When seeking participants, the vocational school was targeted because of its claim of full inclusion. The participants represented a mixture of vocational education teachers who taught students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

All of the participants were at least in their second year of teaching at the selected site and had a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience. All educators held a certificate in secondary education, while only two held a certificate in special education. All participants were employed at the facility being studied for at least one year. See Table 1 for participant demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Race	Education Level	Years of Experience	Grades	Content Taught
George	Male	Caucasian	Associates	3	9-12	Computer Aided Drafting
Tammy	Female	Caucasian	Masters	13	9-12	Mathematics
Shaun	Male	Caucasian	Associates	40	9-12	Automated Machine Technology
Emily	Female	Caucasian	Masters	18	9-12	Science
Corvin	Male	Caucasian	Masters	5	9-12	History
Jillian	Female	Caucasian	Masters	25	9-12	Mathematics
Linda	Female	Caucasian	Masters	15	9-12	Science
Peter	Male	Caucasian	Associates	45	9-12	Culinary Arts
Rachael	Female	Caucasian	Masters	25	9-12	Science

Jon	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors	18	9-12	Automotive
Emilia	Female	Caucasian	Masters	15	9-12	Science
Stephanie	Female	Caucasian	Masters	24	9-12	English Language Arts
Renee	Female	Caucasian	Masters	19	9-12	Business Administration
David	Male	Caucasian	Masters	8	9-12	Mathematics
Kevin	Male	Caucasian	Masters	10	9-12	History

George

George is a male vocational teacher who holds an Associate's degree in his vocation. He has currently been teaching in secondary vocational education for just over three years, and all three have been at the same location. Prior to teaching he worked in his vocational field for over 20 years. He switched to education because he was given the opportunity to teach at his alma mater, and he was interested in educating students with disabilities after the birth of his son, whom has an auditory-processing disorder. George is currently taking three higher education courses in special education, and has attended over five professional development courses in inclusive education. He holds a Massachusetts teaching certificate in Secondary Vocational Education (9-12). He currently teaches Computer Aided Drafting to 9th -12th grade students.

Tammy

Tammy is female academic teacher who holds a Master's degree in special education, and a Bachelor's degree in mathematics. She has been teaching for 13 years, with all 13 of those years at the McMuffin Technical School. Of these 13 years, 10 of them have been to fully inclusive classrooms. Prior to teaching, Tammy worked at a bank as a loan management officer. She switched careers to education, after having her son because "the hours matched my son's

school hours”. She specifically went towards special education because she knew that there would be a need for it. She has taken roughly 15 courses in special education and many professional developments on the topic. She holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Secondary Mathematic Education (9-12), and in Special Education (5-8, and 9-12). She currently teaches all levels of math to 9th and 11th grade students.

Shaun

Shaun is a male vocational teacher who holds an Associate’s degree in his vocation. He has been teaching for over 40 years, and all 40 years have been at the same location. Of these 40 years, all of them have been taught to inclusive classrooms, but only 10 of them have been to fully inclusive classrooms. Prior to teaching, Shaun worked in his vocation, and he switched careers to be an educator because he was offered the chance to teach at his alma mater. He has taken no higher education courses in special education but has taken over 20 professional development courses on the topic. He holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Secondary Vocational Education (9-12). He currently teaches Automated Machine Technology to 9th-12th grade students.

Emily

Emily is a female academic teacher who holds a Master’s degree in secondary education and a Bachelor’s degree in a science field. She has been teaching for 18 years, and 15 of them have been at her current location. Of her 18 years of teaching, 10 of them have been to a fully inclusive classroom. However, Emily reports that she teaches only Advanced Placement courses, therefore, she does not see many of the disabilities that the other educators see. Education has been Emily’s only career since she graduated from college. She has taken no higher education

courses in special education, and only five professional development courses on the topic. She currently teaches Advanced Placement Physics to 12th grade students.

Corvin

Corvin is a male academic teacher that holds a Master's degree in secondary education and a Bachelor's degree in history. He has been teaching for five years, and all five have been at his current location and all five have been in a fully inclusive classroom. Corvin worked in hospitality management before becoming a teacher, but he always knew that his ultimate career goal was to be an educator. He has taken three higher education courses in special education, and four professional development courses in inclusive classrooms. He holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Secondary Social Studies(9-12). He currently teaches all levels of history classes to 9th and 11th grade students.

Jillian

Jillian is a female academic teacher that holds a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and a Bachelor's degree in mathematics. She has been teaching for over 25 years. She taught elementary math as a substitute for her first year of teaching. She taught mathematics at the middle school level for five years. She switched to secondary mathematics and has been teaching it for the past 19 years at the same location. Ten of those 19 years have been teaching to a fully inclusive classroom. She stated that she switched to secondary mathematics because she "liked the challenge of the harder equations". She boasts that she is a "current proponent for full inclusion because after having a son diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum Disorder [sic], I can see the importance of including children in all fragments of life". She has taken no higher education courses in special education but has attended three professional development courses on the topic, and states that she "enjoys reading books on inclusive methods". She currently holds

Massachusetts teaching licenses in Elementary Education (K-5), Middle School Mathematics (6-8), and Secondary Mathematics (9-12). She currently teaches mathematics to 9th, 10th, and 12th graders.

Linda

Linda is a female academic teacher that holds a Master's degree in secondary education, and a Bachelor's degree in chemistry. She has been teaching for 15 years, and all of them have been at the same location. Ten of those 15 years have been teaching to a fully inclusive classroom. Teaching is her career goal, and thus has not had a career outside of education. Her entire family works in the education field, and she knew that she was "destined to teach as well". She has taken five higher education courses in special education, and over eight professional development courses on special education and inclusive education. She currently holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Middle School Science (5-8), and Secondary Chemistry (9-12). She currently teaches all levels of chemistry to 11th grade students, and all levels of forensics to 12th grade students.

Peter

Peter is a male vocational teacher that holds an Associate's degree in his vocation. He has been teaching for over 45 years and all 45 have been at the same institution. Ten of these years have been in a fully inclusive classroom. Prior to teaching, he ran his own catering business, he turned to education because his business was very demanding. He claims that teaching is "just as demanding, but it is more rewarding". He still runs a catering business part-time but teaching fulltime career. He currently holds a Massachusetts Vocational (9-12) teaching license. He currently teaches culinary arts to 9th-12th grade students.

Rachel

Rachel is a female academic teacher that holds a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and a Bachelor's degree in biology. She has been teaching for twenty years. The first two years she taught fourth grade elementary students in another State. She stated that she liked working with younger kids, but her "husband was offered another job, so we had to move States". She then taught for five years at a Middle school in another state. "The local high school in the same area needed a science teacher, they offered me the position, and I wanted the challenge of teaching harder material, so I began teaching high school". Rachel taught high school science in Vermont for nine years, and then "my husband was offered another job elsewhere, so we moved again, and I ended up working here at McMuffin (pseudonym)". She has been teaching at her current location for four years now, and all four of them have been to fully inclusive classrooms. Prior to her four years at her current location, she reports that the other schools were not fully inclusive. Rachel has taken four higher education classes in special education, and over eight professional development courses on special education and inclusion. She currently holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Secondary Biology (9-12), Elementary Education (K-5), and a Vermont Middle School Science License (6-8). She currently teaches all levels of Environmental Science to 9th graders, all levels of Biology to 10th graders, and all levels of Chemistry to 11th graders.

Jon

Jon is a male vocational teacher that holds a Bachelor's degree in Automotive, with a minor in education. He has been teaching for 18 years and all 18 have been at his current location. Ten of those years have been teaching to fully inclusive classrooms. Prior to teaching,

Jon worked as an automotive technician. However, he knew he always wanted to be a teacher and to return to his alma mater, so his automotive technician career was solely to “get experience in the field”. Jon has taken three higher education courses in special education, and over five professional development courses on inclusion. He currently holds a Massachusetts teaching license in secondary Vocation (9-12) and teaches automotive to 9th-12th grade students.

Emilia

Emilia is a female academic teacher that holds a Master’s degree in biology. She has been teaching for a total of 15 years. She first taught middle school science in North Carolina for five years. She then taught middle and secondary science in Vermont for the following eight years. She has been teaching secondary science at her current location for the past two years. Of the fifteen years teaching, the first five years in North Carolina were done to a fully inclusive classroom, and the two years at her current location are to a fully inclusive classroom. Prior to teaching, she worked in a variety of fields including hospitality, and scientific laboratories. She switched to education because she “was inspired by my father whom [sic] taught at a university level”, but was unsure exactly what she wanted, so she waited until she thought she was old enough to make a decision. Emilia has currently taken three courses in special education and over five professional development courses on special education. She currently holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Middle school science (6-8), and a Vermont teaching license in Secondary Biology (9-12). She currently teaches all levels of Environmental science to 9th graders, and all levels of Biology to 10th grade students.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a female academic teacher that holds a Master’s degree in English. She has been teaching for a total of 24 years, with 14 of those years being at the current location. She

first started teaching in a nearby middle school, where she taught English Language Arts for four years to sixth grade students. She then worked at a nearby vocational school where she taught English Language Arts for six years to 9th-12 grade students. When asked why she traded vocational schools she responded that the behaviors of the students and benefits were better at her current location. She also stated that the other vocational school she taught at was inclusive, but not fully inclusive. “My last vocational school had pull out services for the students and had special education classes”. Stephanie stated that to prepare for teaching to fully inclusive classrooms she has taken three separate higher education courses on special education but has not had any professional development on it. She currently teaches all levels of English Language Arts to 9th-12th grade students and holds a Massachusetts teaching license in Middle (5-8) and Secondary (9-12) English and Language Arts.

Renee

Renee is a female vocational educator that holds a Master’s degree in business administration. She has been teaching for a total of 19 years, and all 19 have been at her current location, her alma mater. She graduated with a high school diploma in business administration from McMuffin and attended college in hopes of entering the entrepreneur fields. However, after graduating with a Bachelor’s degree, she felt that was not the right career for her, so she went on to gain a Master’s degree, and then “returned home” when she was offered a position teaching. She has been teaching fully inclusive classrooms for the past ten years. She has taken three higher education courses on special education and five professional development courses on the topic. She has been teaching Business Administration to 9th-12th graders since she began teaching. She holds a Massachusetts Secondary (9-12) Vocational teaching license.

David

David is a male special education teacher. He holds a Master's degree in Special Education. He has been teaching for the past eight years, and only four of those have been at his current location. Prior to working at McMuffin, he worked at a nearby high school as a behavior management and assessment specialist. He left his last position because he wanted to “do more than write behavior plans for students”, and “honestly the benefits were better”. Due to his degree in special education, he has taken many higher education courses in special education and has even run several professional development courses on special education and inclusion. He currently teaches as a co-teacher in mathematics within the classrooms and works to update education plans on the students he monitors. He holds a Massachusetts Secondary (9-12) Special Education teaching license.

Kevin

Kevin is a male academic teacher that holds a Master's degree in History and Social Sciences. He has been teaching for the past 10 years, and all 10 years have been at the current location. Teaching has been his only major career, since this is what he strived for since he was a high school student himself. He stated that he “always wanted to fall into teaching and take after my father who was a history teacher himself”. He has taken three higher education courses in special education, that were required to obtain his state license, and “quite a few” professional development courses on the topic. He currently holds a Massachusetts Secondary (9-12) teaching license in History and teaches 9th-12th grade students.

Results

This section includes the descriptive data obtained from the TEIPS described as a means of noting similarities in how study participants perceived their self-efficacy in inclusive

environments to comments made during their interviews and the focus group. Then, the themes that were extrapolated from the significant statements are presented and supported through the words of the participants are described. Lastly, the research questions that drove this study are answered.

Descriptive Findings for the TEIPS.

The TEIPS is an 18-statement survey that uses a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (see Appendix A). The TEIPS has also been utilized to identify variables that impact perceived self-efficacy in elementary, secondary, and college settings (Park et al., 2016). In this study, descriptive data were obtained as a means of noting similarities in how study participants perceived their self-efficacy in inclusive elementary environments to comments made during their interviews and the focus group. Table 1 conveys all 15 participant responses. Every participant completed the survey prior to the personal interview and no question was left unanswered. Personal responses from the surveys were used as follow points during the personal interviews. The data was used to help garner the current perceived self-efficacy of the participants. Table 2 below shows the TEIPS items/domains, participants’ item ratings along with a breakdown of the percent of responses by rating level.

Table 2

Descriptive TEIPS Data

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	NS	
Efficacy in	1. I am able to provide an alternate explanation/example when students are confused.	5	10	*	*	*
		33.3	66.7			
	2. I can use a variety of assessment strategies (e.g. portfolio assessment, Modified tests, performance based assessment, etc.).	5	9	1	*	*

		33.3	60	6.7		
	3. I am confident in designing learning tasks so that the individual needs of students with disabilities are accommodated.	6	6	2	*	1
		40	40	13.3		6.7
	4. I am confident in my ability to get students to work together in pairs/in small groups.	4	9	1	*	1
		26.7	60	6.7		6.7
	5. I can accurately gauge student comprehension of what I have taught.	2	11	1	*	1
		13.3	73.3	6.7		6.7
	6. I can provide appropriate challenges for very capable students.	5	9	1	*	
		33.3	60	6.7		
	7. I am able to work jointly with other professionals and staff (e.g. aides, other teachers) to teach students with disabilities in the classroom.	7	8		*	*
		46.7	53.3			
	8. I am confident in informing others who know little about laws and policies related to the inclusion of students with disabilities.	2	6	2	5	*
		13.3	40	13.3	33.3	
	9. I am confident in my ability to get parents involved in school activities of their children with disabilities.	1	8	3	*	3
		6.7	53.3	20		20
	10. I can assist families in helping their children do well in school.	4	8	1	*	2
		26.7	53.3	6.7		13.3
	11. I can make parents feel comfortable coming to school.	4	9	*	*	2
		26.7	60			13.3
	12. I can collaborate with other professionals (e.g. itinerant teachers/speech pathologists) in designing educational plans for students with disabilities.	4	10	*	1	*
		26.7	66.7		6.7	
	13. I am able to calm a student who is disruptive/noisy	4	11	*	*	*

	26.7	73.33			
14. I am confident in my ability to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom before it occurs.	5	9	*	*	1
	33.3	60			6.7
15. I can control disruptive behavior in the classroom.	5	9	1	*	*
	33.3	60	6.7		
16. I can make my expectations clear about student behavior.	9	6			
	60	40			
17. I am confident when dealing with students who are physically aggressive.	2	5	4	3	1
	13.3	22.2	26.7	20	6.7
18. I am able to get children to follow classroom rules.	4	10	1	*	*
	26.7	66.7	6.7		

Note. SD – Strongly disagree, D – Disagree, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree, NS- Not Sure, *- No Response

Reflective Journal

A reflective journal was kept during the duration of this study to ensure biases were kept in check. Before and after each face-to-face interview, each focus group session, and each data analysis session an entry was written to help eliminate biases and solve problems for foreseeable future events. A common challenge that was recorded within the journal was researcher bias, specifically ensuring that all questions for the participants were neutral, and in a non-judgmental tone. To prevent this, journal entries were recorded, and questions were written prior to the participant's participation. See Appendix G for journal entry data.

Themes

Throughout data collection, analysis, and synthesis, I placed aside my presuppositions within a reflective journal and engaged in the epoche (see Appendix G) to gain a fresh perspective of the participants' experience and ensured that my consciousness remained open. The interviews and the focus groups were transcribed and thoroughly read, and read again, to ensure accuracy. The journaling allowed me to abandon any preconceived notions I may have had toward inclusive education. All statements from each of the data sources were given equal value through horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Each statement was explored for potential textural meanings, was then coded using NVivo, and finally clustered into themes using phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). After analyzing each data source, initial codes were constructed and developed into open codes. Four primary themes and 10 subthemes emerged from open coding. The themes and subthemes for the data sources are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes for all Data Sources

Theme	Subthemes
Successful inclusion	Success of Students
Prior Experiences	Experiences outside the classroom Training
Awareness	Biases Achievement Gap Changing efficacies
School Environment	Small Class Sizes Greater accessibility to resources Administrative support School Climate

Successful Inclusion

The first theme identified during the survey data analysis was the participants all had a rather high level of self-efficacy, with one subtheme emerging as *success of the students*. After analyzing the surveys and speaking with participants through the interviews and focus groups, it was clear that the teachers developed self-efficacy through their own teaching experiences, and the ease that assistive resources were available for their use within the classroom. Responses on the TEIPS suggested that the majority of the participants currently have a perceived high self-efficacy to teaching in inclusive classrooms. Results from the TEIPS demonstrate that 89.96% of participants strongly agreed or agreed with items suggesting they possess high efficacy in classroom instruction, 80% ($n = 12$) agreed or strongly agreed that they possess efficacy in collaboration, and 85.0% ($n = 13$) agreed or strongly agreed they possess efficacy in management. These high agreement portrays that most of the participants believe they possess high efficacy for instructing students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom; however, when speaking to participants in a face-to-face formation during personal interviews, one-third ($n = 5$) of the participants were not cognizant of their overall high self-efficacy. “I have a medium confidence level when it comes to teaching in an inclusive classroom; I am a fairly new teacher, so my scope is limited when it comes to my experiences here” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Unlike Corvin, Emily has been teaching for much longer, but she still felt she had a lower self-confidence. “I have a medium level of confidence because I've been doing it for a long time, and I think that I put the effort into giving my special education students the extra help that they need” (Emily, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Similar to Corvin and Emily, Jon stated “Sometimes, some classes are easier than others; many times, I feel I do really well and other times I feel I need new tactics to do a better job”

(Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While Renee stated, “I do not feel it's my best skill, but feel up to the challenge or confident enough in my ability to try my best to teach in inclusive classrooms” (Renee, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Kevin, stated this his self-efficacy wavers. “I am moderate some days, and others not. I try to accommodate across the board for students, so an inclusive classroom feels somewhat natural. This becomes much more difficult when specific disabilities or a large gap in capability or understanding occur” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Most of the participants verbally claimed a high level of self-efficacy towards teaching to inclusive classrooms. Tammy and David referenced their high level to prior education or training. “My Special Education degree and team-teaching with a capable special educator have really increased my efficacy” (Tammy, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). While David stated, “I believe that my education played a role in my confidence” (David, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). The other participants stated their efficacy came from past experiences. “I do this every day and working directly with students for six hours a day five days a week allows me time to work with all students and perfect my teaching ability” (Shaun, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Linda explained that,

Volunteering at Double H Ranch (one of Paul Newman's camps) in Lake Luzerne, New York for over 10 years gave me the confidence to interact with, and normalized, providing as inclusive of an environment as possible for everyone, regardless of physical, social-emotional, or mental ability. (Personal Communication, May 25, 2022)

Most of the participants have a long history of working in inclusive environments. Some, like Jillian and Peter, have only taught in inclusive environments, and that is the norm for them. Jillian stated that “I have always taught in an inclusive classroom” (Jillian Focus Group, June 30,

2022), while Peter stated that he has “done it my entire teaching career” (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Regardless of the perceived attributes that have affected the self-efficacy of the participants, it can be seen that the majority of them have a high efficacy when it comes to teaching to inclusive education.

Student Success

The subtheme identified under successful inclusion that was garnered from the survey, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups was the success of the students. All participants felt that to measure the success of a classroom, one needs to look at whether or not the student is succeeding. “An indicator of a successful inclusive classroom, and therefore my confidence, is when all students succeed” (George, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Tammy stated that she knows she is capable of teaching to inclusive classrooms when “each student reaches proficiency in concepts and skills that match their abilities (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Many of the participants felt their own self-efficacy towards inclusive education increases when the success of the students increases. In order to measure the success of students, many participants felt there needs to be a variety of assessments. Such assessments can include engagement, “students who struggle academically, behaviorally and social-emotionally are able to engage and comprehend the content being presented to their best extent possible, alongside peers” (Linda, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022); or “Standard assessment tools that have been modified or scaffolded to accommodate the specific needs of students (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022); or “frequent observations and analysis of student data with progress toward individual student goals” (Shaun, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When there are a variety of methods that students can demonstrate their success on, the teacher’s therefore feel more

confident in their ability to educate an inclusive classroom, and ultimately their self-efficacy increases.

Prior Experiences

The second theme emerging from analysis of the survey, interviews, and focus groups credited for building a high self-efficacy within the participants was prior experiences within the occupation and with inclusion. Most of the participants have completed many years of teaching to inclusive classrooms, so they have many years of experience to help learn from. “Each year I have become more confident - primarily through trial and error, and personal persistence (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Concerning the years of experience, Emilia commented,

I worked for a decade in a school that was, with the exception of some math classes, heterogeneously grouped. I also taught an AP class that fulfilled a state requirement, so many college-bound students who weren't strong science students were enrolled in the class. I therefore, have learned how to differentiate for all academic levels, and this experience with it all has drastically increased my confidence in inclusion and ultimately my efficacy. (Personal Communication, May 25, 2022)

Experiences outside the Classroom

The first subtheme to prior experiences was that many of the participants experience inclusion in ways that differ from their simple role as an educator in the inclusive classroom. A few of the other participants have alternate experiences that they feel have increased their self-efficacy in inclusion. George shared, “One of my children has an IEP and I have had countless interactions with teachers, special education teachers, and specialists about my child's unique situation, which culminates in my being more empathetic with the students and parents” (George, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Kevin stated that he “grew up with a sister

with down syndrome” and that he had to watch his family “battle with external sources at including my sister” (Kevin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022).

Both Peter and Linda have dealt with the education field on the other side. Peter stated that “My mother was a science teacher for 20+years at middle school and high school age students and I observed her for many years”(Peter, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022).

Linda explained, “I come from a family of educators (sibling, parent, grandparent, aunts, and uncles) and inclusion has always been a key moral that I've valued” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). The participants feel that these interactions with education, outside of teaching, have really helped them foster their self-efficacy with inclusion.

Training

The second subtheme under self-efficacy was training. Several participants felt their high level of self-efficacy to teaching to inclusive classrooms was due to prior training. Both Tammy and Kevin had taken courses in special education for their specific special education licenses. Emilia had even written her Masters’ thesis on the topic. “I wrote on the heterogeneously grouped classrooms and whether they increased student engagement as measured through the likelihood of their enrollment in AP sciences later in high school” (Emilia, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). However, one-third ($n = 5$) of the instructors not only took undergraduate courses toward inclusive education, but also participated in frequent professional development courses. “I had to take a few college courses in order to obtain a vocational teaching license, but I have participated in several professional development opportunities to better my understanding of inclusive education” (David, Personal Communication, May, 25, 2022). Corvin, also has taken a few courses: “I have taken one Special Education course at the Grad School level, a few courses

at the undergraduate level, and some after school PDP sessions hosted by the Student Services department at my school” (Corvin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022).

All participants have varying training within inclusive education. Some took a few professional development courses (i.e., Stephanie, Shaun, Emily, and Peter), while others took both college and professional development options (i.e., George, Tammy, Corvin, Jillian, Linda, Rachel, Jon, Emilia, Renee, David, and Kevin). Regardless, most of the participants felt, that these courses have assisted in their self-efficacy. “I’ve taken classes on differentiation, ADHD, reading graphic organizers, etcetera, and all of them have helped my better my teaching craft” (Stephanie, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Awareness

The third theme identified during data analysis was awareness of the educator’s own personal factors, and the three subthemes that emerged were biases of full inclusion, the achievement gaps, and the educator’s own changing efficacies. The educators are aware of their efficacies but feel that their own personal factors can hinder or benefit their efficacies. Just as the participants are aware of their prior experiences that helped or harmed their successful inclusive classrooms, they were also aware of what seems to work in an inclusive classroom and how that intermingled with their beliefs. Many of the participants (i.e., George, Tammy, Shaun, Corvin, Linda, Peter, Jon, Renee, and David) felt that a continuum of placements needed to be put into place in order to better meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education. “We really need extra trained professionals in the room, or there needs to be some sort of pull-out service for extra instruction” (Jon, Focus Group, June, 30, 2022). Similar to Jon, George stated that “students who need special services are not necessarily getting what they need in a general classroom setting, and in this case, the goal should be to get a student into a general classroom

setting if possible” (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Kevin stated that “large gaps in understanding or comprehension make it very difficult to educate all students in the room. Sometimes, a student needs an alternate setting so they can have differentiated one-on-one time that is adjusted to their specific needs” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Currently, the participants all work at an institution that encompasses full inclusion. Although, there are co-taught courses, and paraprofessionals for some classes, most, have just one educator in the room. This poses a problem to the aforementioned participants. “Most of our special education students need an academic support class, with a flexible curriculum and flexible assessments” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Peter stated that a few of the students really need “academic support classes and social emotional classes” (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Biases Related to Full inclusion

Many participants are even aware of their own bias towards the push to full inclusion versus IDEA’s requirement for a continuum of alternative placement options. In fact, 11 of the participants are against the school’s full inclusion environment, and desire to have a continuum of alternative placement options instead.

Full inclusion looks great on paper and on grant applications, but when it comes to making it happen, it is exhausting work in some cases. If we are going to lift the banner of full inclusion in public schools, there best be resources available to us (more paraprofessionals, more prep time, smaller teacher-to-student ratios) to make is possible” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

George, Shaun, Linda, Rachel, Jon, Emilia, Stephanie, Renee, David, and Kevin all agreed with Corvin, and stated that inclusion should occur, but there needs to be a continuum.

“Students should be placed in the best environment to meet their needs” (Emilia, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Shaun stated that “Students need a continuum of services. Some actually really need and will benefit from being pulled out, and without it we are harming our student’s success” (Shaun, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Linda went on to point out that,

Sometimes there are students who academically excel and should be given the opportunity to go way above and beyond what their struggling peers might. Sometimes students who excel academically struggle behaviorally and would be better placed in a classroom with other students who excel behaviorally but struggle academically. When we take away the option of finding the best learning scenario for each student, we are impeding their education. Ultimately, impeding education makes us [teachers] failures. (Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

Achievement Gap

The second subtheme that emerged from the educator’s awareness was that many participants felt like the achievement gap between high achieving students and students with disabilities, was not being closed as indicated by prior data or if it was, it was not beneficial. Most of the participants felt like the achievement gap was not being met and would never be met. “There continues to be an achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers” (Rachel, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). The participants who felt like the gap would never be closed, attributed to a student’s cognitive levels. A “student’s developmental levels, effort, comprehension and learning will always result in differing achievement” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Two of the participants even stated that high achieving students will always be high achieving. George stated, “High achieving students are going to find a way

to excel regardless” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Similar to George, Peter stated “some students will always go above and beyond expectations” (Peter, June 30, 2022).

A few of the participants felt that the achievement was nearing, but in a damaging way. Jon stated “I think it's [i.e., inclusion] good in a way but I feel there needs to be more support as I cannot challenge the students that need to be challenged as much as I would like when a ton of time is taken to work with the ones who are struggling” (Jon, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Similar to Jon, Corvin stated “more students can find success in a CP [College Preparatory] level course, but I think inevitably it will cause the depth of content instruction to decrease to ensure that all are learning the same content (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Even Peter stated that “it [i.e., inclusion] may be closing the gap”, but it is doing it in “two ways: bringing the top performers down and the struggling students up” and he feels “it's not fair to the top performers” (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Changing Efficacies

The third subtheme that emerged from questioning individual factors was that some of the participants noted that their self-efficacies have changed from year to year. George, Tammy, Linda, David, Rachel, Stephanie, and Renee all reported that their self-efficacies towards teaching to inclusive classrooms have increased since they began teaching. Rachel stated that her “confidence level has increased, all due to time, experience, training, working closely with special educators” (Rachel, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). George agreed with Rachel, stating that “having a great network of co-teachers to bounce ideas off is key” (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Other educators felt that they believe their self-efficacy has increased because they have altered their teaching styles. “Each year I have become more confident - primarily through trial-

and-error and personal persistence” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Jillian stated that her self-efficacy increased when she learned to “differentiate all my lessons no matter if the students have a disability or no” (Jillian, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Still, some of the participants felt that their self-efficacy decreased since the start of teaching. Corvin stated:

I received very little training on this matter (inclusion), and I feel like I am not able to adequately meet the needs of my students in all circumstances. The one SPED course I took in grad school was the one I almost failed - the instructor even pointed out that it was strange that someone with a few years under my belt had such a small basis of understanding when it came to Special Education. I need more training and observation time so I can build my confidence. (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

Jon stated that “The first few years I struggled with my confidence, as the years passed, and I became more experienced and talked to peers about different strategies I felt much better. Then this year came and I’m back to struggling a bit” (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). All participants stated that their self-efficacy changes from day-to-day, or year-to-year because “Each situation and student comes with their own challenges, so some situations are certainly easier than others, and therefore some days I have the answers, and some I don’t” (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Classroom Environment

The final theme that emerged to determine successful inclusion was the environment. All participants conceded that the school environment itself impacts their perceived efficacy on a daily basis. Many precipitating factors that the participants have no control over were perceived as influential on their self-efficacy. For example, Corvin shared,

My window blinds are broken, so kids can easily stare out the window. I only have 45 minute classes, so I need to execute my lesson plans quickly. This can also make for a lapse in content- these simple environmental factors can all really set back my efficacy in teaching to inclusive classrooms because they all increase my personal struggle. (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

When educators have working equipment, and needed resources are available, it makes it less of a struggle for them to teach to the varying levels of cognition, and therefore makes a classroom more successful because it becomes easier for students to succeed. “If a teacher feels ill-prepared because they lack the resources needed to meet the needs of the student, then success in the classroom is hindered, and then the teacher feels like they failed at teaching” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Four subthemes emerged from the school environment: small class size, greater accessibility to resources, administrative support, and the climate.

Small Class Size

One environmental factor every participant felt would foster their self-efficacy for the better was the small class size. “Smaller classes would make a huge difference in the inclusive setting” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Reasons for advocating for smaller class sizes varied. One reason is that having a small group of students allows for “a better instructor-student ratio” (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). In large classes, “it is hard to accommodate diverse learning needs when the teacher-to-student ratio is unfavorable to these needs (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Having smaller class sizes allows the teacher to have more time to work independently with every student. “When you have too many students with a large curve of special needs in the same group or at the same time, then not all students get the assistance they need (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Another reason for the promotion of small class sizes is that having a large class size also “creates more distractions because now there is more happening in the room for those students who are easily distracted” (Emilia, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When there is a large group of people, not even students, in one area it offers more ease for distractions to occur. “Many of our students with disabilities are easily distracted, so when those students are placed in environments that offer more of a chance for distractions, it makes managing the class harder” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Greater Accessibility to Resources

The second subtheme that emerged from the classroom environment data was accessibility to resources. For students to succeed, they need to “have access to content in multiple ways (verbal, hard-copy, electronic), and therefore the teachers need to have those resources available to them” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Shaun stated that “putting the students with the right equipment to learn is the best way to have success” (Shaun, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). If teachers cannot provide the students with those resources, then student success is minimal. Participants felt that resources included extra personnel and services, and adequate physical resources.

Few participants stated that having trained professionals within the inclusive classroom was key to success. “We really need extra trained professionals in the room, or there needs to be some sort of pull-out service for extra instruction” (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Similar to Jon, Renee stated that in order for inclusion to be successful, “extra trained professionals in the room are needed” (Renee, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While Emilia agreed with the need for extra personnel and stated that those extra personnel needed “better training for teachers to effectively use the support of professionals” (Emilia, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Some participants also stated that there is not just a need for paraprofessionals and other services, but also for co-taught classes. “Having a team-taught environment with content and special education teachers together is ideal in the inclusive classroom” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). “Team-teach [sic] environments are becoming more routine, and it really provides the opportunity for two professionals to effectively educate a variety of students” (Stephanie, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When a special education teachers and content teacher work together in a classroom “they create the opportunity for the curriculum to be available to everyone” (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022) because content teachers are really capable of presenting the curriculum and are knowledgeable of said curriculum, while the special education teachers are better at figuring out how to modify or accommodate the curriculum.

In order to have a successful inclusive classroom, an educator needs to be able to teach in a variety of methods, with a variety of resources. Having physical resources available if needed offers an educator the chance to be able to teach with a variety of mediums for a variety of educational needs. These resources include “speech-to-text or text-to-speech devices, Chrome books or computers, fidget toys, earphones, and simple things like extra paper” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When an accommodation or modification needs to be met, but the resources to achieve it are lacking, then the educator cannot teach a child successfully and this can hinder a teacher’s self-efficacy.

Administrative Support

The third subtheme that emerged from looking at the environmental influences data was administrative support. “I think a supportive administration is a key factor” (Peter, Focus Group, June 30, 2022) in helping the self-efficacy of educators. “Educator engagement and development

have a significant impact on student achievement in an inclusive classroom and coaching by administrators to support these practices is important (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Specifically, the participants felt that having consistent discipline policies in the schools helped with inclusive education. “Having a consistent school discipline policy would help with the classroom management and having administrators that support that policy would make for a much easier management” (Emily, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). A prime part of education is classroom management. When classrooms are managed well, student success is better. So, when schools have a disciplinary policy that is fully supported by administration, it makes classroom management easier because it “allows educators to enforce even the most basic school rules among all students” (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

School Climate

The final subtheme that emerged from the data concerning environmental influences was the school climate. Participants stated that a facet that really helps foster inclusive education, and by part their efficacy in the inclusive classroom is the school climate. Corvin stated that “building a strong sense of community in the classroom, where everyone needs to feel welcome is important in successful inclusion” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). In order to build a community within the classroom, it starts in the school as a whole.

School culture is important. The fact that all of the students are part of the school, and the culture of the school is set so that everyone leaves their problems at the door, then school becomes a safe place where everyone is ready to learn, can speak without ridicule. (Emily, Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

Creating and fostering a school community that is welcoming to all types of students begins with “focusing on respect for all” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). If educators

teach students to respect differences, and continuously model the behavior demonstrating respect, then a climate will build that does nothing but respects the differences. When a school “respects all differences, then it offers the chance for students to feel safe, and once a child feels safe, they are capable of learning” (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Research Question Responses

This transcendental phenomenological study was guided by four research questions. The research questions sought to learn how educators define whether inclusive classrooms are successful or unsuccessful, and to describe the shared experiences of the perceived failed or successful inclusive classrooms within the vocational school.

The four themes identified during data analysis: (a) Successful Inclusion, (b) Prior Experiences, (c) Awareness and (d) Classroom Environment supported participants’ responses to each of the research questions below.

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences that shape self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts? This research question was designed to explore the current factors that influence self-efficacy of general educators teaching in inclusive vocational classrooms. One primary theme, (a) successful inclusion, and one sub-theme (b) student success, emerged during data analysis. See Table 4 for the open codes, themes, and subthemes in relation to sub-research question one.

Table 4

<i>Open Codes, Themes, and Subthemes in Relation to Sub-Research Question One</i>			
Open Codes	Occurrence of Open Codes Across all Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
Assessments	55	Successful Inclusion	Student Success

Integration	20
Observation	20
Grades	68
Total	163

The participants' current perceived instructional self-efficacy revolved around the participants' success within the classroom. The more that the teacher's believed that their classroom was successful, the higher their self-efficacy was. The success of the classroom was measured through the success of the students. Specifically, the class was deemed successful if the students were grasping the material being taught at their own levels. Renee stated that if "all of my students are able to access the class material in a way that best meets their abilities, and I am able to challenge them, then I think my class is a success" (Renee, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Like Renee, Tammy stated that she feels like an effective teacher when "each student reaches proficiency in concepts and skills that match their abilities" (Tammy, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Emilia stated that she felt most effective when,

All students are able to access the class material in a way that best meets their abilities, while challenging them to develop learning skills in other areas. Even when students communicate [sic] a high level of comprehension and demonstrate a high level of skill. (Emilia, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022)

Similar to Renee, Tammy, and Emilia, Shaun stated that his self-efficacy in inclusive education increases when he has successful classrooms, and this success results from the success of the students, which is measured in varying methods.

When I realized that students are at all different levels, I learned to change my teaching strategies accordingly, and I learned to change my assessment strategies. We need to

assess the students on what they can do and are capable of doing, not what they can do when compared to someone else. (Shaun, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022)

Sub- Question Two

What prior experiences shape the self-efficacy of general education teachers working with students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational settings in Massachusetts? This sub-research question was designed to understand what perceived experiences help or hinder educators that work in fully inclusive classrooms. “Prior Experiences” emerged as the primary theme, with two subthemes being (a) training and (b) experiences outside the classroom. See Table 5 for the open codes, themes, and subthemes in relation to sub-research question two.

Table 5

Open Codes, Themes, and Subthemes in Relation to Sub-Research Question Two

Open Codes	Occurrence of Open Codes Across all Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
Professional	45	Prior Experiences	Training
Development	112		Experiences outside the Classroom
Undergraduate	89		
Graduate	214		
Special education Class	35		
Volunteer	40		
Family/sister/child Occupation	125		
Total	660		

Participants viewed some of their self-efficacy to prior experiences. Many participants have worked within the inclusive classrooms for years. This experience within the field aligns with their self-efficacy. The more teachers experienced inclusive education, the more they felt effective in teaching to inclusive classes. The participants' past experiences increased their self-efficacy in teaching to fully inclusive classrooms. Jon asserted, "I have been teaching for years, and prior successful experiences have really increased my confidence in teaching" (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). David said that his "education and life experiences have played a role in my level of confidence (David, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Emilia stated that "working for as long as I have in a variety of locations has really helped me foster my teaching profession for all differences" (Emilia, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Kevin stated,

I try to accommodate across the board for students, so an inclusive classroom feels somewhat natural. This becomes much more difficult when specific disabilities or a large gap in capability or understanding occurs, but my experience with inclusion and all of the training I have received through undergraduate and professional development courses have helped me navigate the inclusive classroom. (Kevin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022)

Like David, Jon, and Kevin, both Corvin and Linda also attribute their prior experiences as influencing their self-efficacy. "I have taken one Special Education course at the Grad School level, a few courses at the undergraduate level, and some after school PDP sessions hosted by the Student Services department at my school all which help train me with inclusion (Corvin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Linda stated, "attending and completing PD's specifically geared toward inclusive classrooms every few years continues to help me" (Linda, Personal Communication, My 25, 2022).

Sub-Question Three

How do individual factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts? This sub-research question was designed to understand what individual factors may influence educator’s self-efficacy. It seeks to understand what current attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets educators possess that may impact their self-efficacy. “Awareness” emerged as the primary theme, with three subthemes being (a) biases, (b) achievement gap, and (c) changing efficacies. See Table 6 for the open codes, themes, and subthemes in relation to sub-research question three.

Table 6

Open Codes, Themes, and Subthemes in Relation to Sub-Research Question Three

Open Codes	Occurrence of Open Codes Across all Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
Higher achieving students	89	Awareness	Biases
Closing gap	45		Achievement Gap
Continuum	55		Changing Efficacies
Beliefs	93		
Level of confidence	89		
Total	371		

Participants were very aware of their own prejudices toward, or against full inclusion. Shaun stated, “I disagree with full inclusion, because some students actually really need and benefit from being pulled out- there needs to be a continuum” (Shaun, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). George also disagreed with full inclusion, but stated that,

My confidence in teaching is not impacted by how I feel because every kid deserves to be taught regardless of where they are, or where they come from. Prejudices, dislikes, my own beliefs- they have no place in a classroom, and just because I disagree with something, it doesn't mean it still can't work. (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

Some educators even noted that even though they think full inclusion is “harming” the students, it does not impact their teaching styles. “By assuming the idea of a ‘one-size-fits-all’, we have taken away from the individuality of the student, and it has become my job to ensure that students keeps their individuality” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Tammy asserted,

Success is dependent on the thoughtful implementation [sic]. For example, I see that my high achieving students are not getting the challenges they need because I am having to diminish and modify the curriculum for the lower achieving students, so I find ways to implement challenges for them. (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022)

The participants were aware of their own biases, and very aware on how their self-efficacy was not impacted by them. Specifically, the participants felt that full inclusion was not successful for all students, and that the achievement gap was not being closed. Neither of the biases impacted the participant's self-efficacy, rather, their self-efficacy changed from year-to-year based on their experiences. Jon stated, “My confidence in teaching wavers and changes every day, and it is all due to whether or not my students succeed” (Jon, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Linda agreed with Jon and stated that “every day she leaves work feeling like she succeeded as a teacher or failed because every day has new challenges” (Stephanie, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Jillian added that “even my confidence in teaching specific units each year wavers because it all depends on what diversity is within my classroom and whether or not I know I can handle it” (Jillian, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Sub-Question Four

How do current school environmental factors influence the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts? This sub-research question was designed to understand educators' perceptions of the influence of environmental factors on their inclusive classrooms. "Classroom Environment" emerged as the primary theme. Four subthemes within the primary theme were identified during data analysis, including (a) small class size, (b) greater accessibility to resources, (c) administrative support and (d) school climate. See Table 7 for open codes, themes, and subthemes in relation to sub-research questions four.

Table 7

Open Codes, Themes, and Subthemes in Relation to Sub-Research Question Four

Open Codes	Occurrence of Open Codes Across all Data Points	Theme	Subthemes
Small	115	Classroom Environment	Small Class Size
Paraprofessional	83		Greater Accessibility to Resources
Academic support	45		School Climate
Assistive technology	55		
Materials	35		
Respect and support	64		
Equality	20		
Policy	25		
Total	442		

Experiences really impacted the participants' perceived self-efficacy. The perceived experiences were either benefited or were harmed from environmental factors. All of these

factors either made teaching to inclusive classrooms easier or harder. The teachers' perceptions of their classroom environments aligned with their self-efficacy. The more teachers perceived their classroom environment as difficult or challenging, the more they doubted their ability to teach. Perceived environmental barriers created negative experiences in teaching fully inclusive classes, and in turn decreased their self-efficacies. Corvin said, "I felt stressed the other day knowing I have students that really need one-on-one directions, but I could not give it to them because there were 27 other kids in the classroom, and I did not have the time to do it all" (Corvin, Focus Group June 30, 2022). George asserted, "I have a student that needs speech-to-text, but no computers were available today to help him. How am I supposed to get him caught up?" (George, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

Like Corvin and George, Emily and Jillian also found environmental conditions to waver their self-efficacy; however, they stated that lack of administrative support also impacted them. Emily stated, "I send a student to the office for insubordination, and the student received no punishment, and therefore returned to make a mockery of my class. How am I supposed to maintain classroom management then?" (Emily, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Jillian said, "When administration does not encourage us to progress with professional developments, how are we supposed to continue perfecting our teaching practice?" (Jillian, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When environmental conditions impact the success of the students, then the teacher's perceived self-efficacy wavers.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this transcendental phenomenological study investigating the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The findings reflected the

experiences and perceptions of 15 participants with self-efficacy teaching in inclusive classrooms and were organized according to four themes and 10 subthemes. The four themes that emerged from the data analysis were (a) successful inclusion, (b) prior experiences, (c) awareness and (d) classroom environment. Numerous quotes from participants were used to support the above items. The results from the survey, personal communication interviews, and focus groups revealed that the participants' self-efficacy was in a continuous state of wavering, and was informed by their students' success, their past experiences, and the classroom environments. Teachers experienced increased self-efficacy through their experiences with successful inclusion, prior experiences, awareness, and the beneficial classroom environment factors. However, many of the same participants also experienced decreased self-efficacy when they perceived their classrooms as failing academically or challenging environmentally. These perceptions increased self-doubt about their teaching ability which diminished their self-efficacy in teaching inclusive classrooms.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe teachers' perceived experiences that shape self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts. This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations, and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with an overall summary.

Discussion

This study explored the vocational teachers' ($N = 15$) lived experience with perceived self-efficacy in fully inclusive vocational classrooms. Through triangulated data sources mentioned in the previous chapter, the shared experiences of the participants were categorized into the following four themes: (a) successful inclusion, (b) prior experiences, (c) awareness, and (d) classroom environment. This section discusses the study's findings in relation to the above themes and supports the interpretation of those findings with empirical and theoretical literature along with narrative evidence from participants.

Interpretation of Findings

The vocational teacher's perceived self-efficacy for inclusive classrooms tends to be impacted by many different factors. Teachers experienced increased self-efficacy through perceived successful classrooms, prior experiences, awareness of biases, and classroom environment. Vocational teachers also experienced subjective shifts, or fluctuations within their perceived self-efficacy from day-to-day, and year-to year. This fluctuation corresponds with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy fluctuates in different situations since it

refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform behaviors necessary to succeed in certain situations (Bandura, 1977).

Summary of Thematic Findings

The following four primary themes emerged from data analysis: successful inclusion, prior experiences, awareness, and classroom environment. The themes aligned with the theoretical framework of this phenomenological research study. Successful inclusion included the subtheme of student success. Vocational teachers experienced increased self-efficacy when their students were perceived as succeeding in the classroom. Student success was measured by a variety of strategies. Teachers felt an increased self-efficacy when students met predetermined outcomes, such as passing grades on assessments, or meeting the goals within the student's education plan. Vocational teachers deemed that student success should be determined upon the student's own capabilities and not a standardized format. Having such assessments created specifically for students, increased the likelihood that the student would succeed, and therefore the teacher's self-efficacy would be increased.

The theme prior experiences included the subthemes of training and experiences outside the classroom. Vocational teachers experienced increased self-efficacy through their prior experiences with inclusion. Many educators stated that their increased self-efficacy was from prior experiences wither working directly in the field, or through prior training or courses taken. High self-efficacy was attributed to a longer time teaching to inclusive classrooms, and more courses taken. Teachers also experienced increased self-efficacy due to their interactions with inclusion outside of the normal academic classroom. Having family members that required services, or family members that also worked within the education field, increased the educator's perceived self-efficacy.

The theme of teacher awareness included subthemes biases, achievement gap, and changing efficacies. Teachers stated that their self-efficacy was not decreased or increased when they had biases toward full inclusion. Several teachers recognized that they are against full inclusion because they felt it does not close the achievement gap like it has claimed to. The teachers stated that they want a continuum of resources and feel that students would succeed better if it was in place. However, teachers felt their biases against full inclusion do not decrease their self-efficacy because they have recognized that efficacies are constantly changing, even day-to-day. Therefore, teachers felt that if they harbored their bias against full inclusion, then their self-efficacy should constantly be decreased, however it was not, and ultimately not perceived as an influence to their self-efficacy.

The theme classroom environment included subthemes of (a) small class sizes, (b) greater accessibility to resources, and (c) school climate. Teachers believed they would have increased self-efficacy if the inclusive class sizes were smaller, allowing more one-on-one instruction. A smaller teacher/student ratio would allow students to receive the individualized instruction they need and distractions from other students minimized. Teachers also felt that their self-efficacy increased when they had availability to resources. Teachers believe that having assistive technologies to help differentiate instruction allows for more student success, and therefore the student's increased self-efficacy. Even with the classroom being small in size and with the resources, teachers felt their self-efficacy increased when the school climate fostered inclusivity, and when administrators have consistent policies that help foster the environment. The key takeaways regarding self-efficacy while teaching to inclusive vocational classrooms was that teachers' self-efficacy is influenced by prior experiences, and by environmental factors, and that teachers are committed to teaching their students.

Successful Inclusion Can Be Impacted by a Teacher’s Self-Efficacy. A teacher’s self-efficacy is instrumental to the success of their students. As the participants spoke about teaching to inclusive classrooms, it became evident that the participants gauged the success of their inclusive classrooms based upon the success of all of their students. In educational settings, if an educator’s self-efficacy is high, then their educational methods will indirectly be impacted (Block et al., 2018), resulting in student success (Carmargo et al., 2016).

Self-efficacy is a situational form of self-confidence (Block et al, 2018), and if that confidence is low, then teacher’s educational performance will be low, and the overall success of the students will be low (Jenson, 2018). Corvin stated that he was a “fairly new teacher” so his “skills and abilities” were low, which some days resulted in a “low confidence towards teaching a unit, and ultimately low assessment scores” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Conversely, Kevin stated that he has a “moderately high confidence” in teaching because he “accommodates across the board” and has developed “many alternate methods for accessing student knowledge that results in the classroom’s success” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). The more skills and practices that educators have within an area, the more confident they feel to teach it, and the better their teaching skills will be (Block et al., 2018), resulting in higher student success (Guerra & Wubban, 2017).

Teachers with higher self-efficacy are found to have higher proficiencies in adjusting teaching strategies and pedagogy that positively impact their student outcomes (Woodcock & Jones, 2020). In inclusive classrooms, this finding is important for student success due to the wide diversity of students. George stated that for any classroom “material must be taught in a variety of ways, practiced in a variety of ways, and assessed in a variety of ways” (George, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). In order to offer a variety of methods of teaching and

assessing, a person needs “patience, practice, and a whole lot of experience” (Stephanie, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Through training and experience a teacher can learn skills and practices for dealing with instructional differences (Yeo et al., 2016), and how to best accommodate those differences.

The assessment of the student’s success within an inclusive classroom should not be equal, but rather equitable, and based on an individual student needs and characteristics (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Measuring student success should be done with a plethora of methods since “each student is not a statistic and therefore should not be measured like one” (Linda, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Measuring the success of inclusive classrooms should be done in a variety of methods so that each student demonstrates “proficiency in concepts and skills that match their ability” (Shaun, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Measuring the success of a student should be done so that all “neurologically diverse demographics are adequately challenged and given platforms to succeed” (Emilia, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). When an educator has high self-efficacy, and therefore higher proficiencies in adjusting their teaching strategies (Kattari, 2015), they offer a higher chance of student success.

Teacher’ Commitment Can Impact the Success of Inclusion. Teacher’s self-efficacy was instrumental to their commitment to teaching in fully inclusive classrooms. As the participants spoke about their inclusive classrooms, it became evident that they gained a sense of commitment through their self-efficacy experiences with mastery experience or performance accomplishment, and vicarious experience. In educational settings, educators’ self-efficacies have been found to play a key role in commitment (Jenson, 2018) and those educators with increased self-efficacy have a greater commitment to their students (Dea & Negassa, 2019).

Many educators gained a feeling of accomplishment in their teaching performance from their repeated exposure to the inclusive classroom. This feeling of accomplishment created a mastery experience. Tammy stated, “My training in special education combined with my years of co-teaching has made me more comfortable within the inclusive classroom” (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While Rachel explained, “I have so many years of prior successful classrooms, that I feel confident in what I do” (Rachel, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Repeated exposure to the inclusive classroom increases teachers’ self-efficacy through mastery of experience. If an individual masters a certain behavior, their self-efficacy increases (Shani & Hebel, 2016), and heightened self-efficacy enhances teacher commitment (Huang et al., 2019).

Teachers were committed to their students’ success in the classroom which led to the feelings teachers had for teaching performance accomplishment. Corvin stated “students with disabilities want to feel success just like their peers (without disabilities), and it is our job to help them” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While Linda stated that “creating moments where students can find success according to their strength sets is what makes a truly effective classroom” (Linda, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Gonzalez et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between teachers’ commitment and their self-efficacy, and even if teachers are not committed to their institution, they can still be committed to their students because of their heightened sense of self-efficacy (Hind, Larkin, & Dunn, 2019).

Vicarious experience is beneficial to self-efficacy, and teachers with increased self-efficacy exert a strong commitment to teaching (Wilson et al., 2018). These vicarious experience refer to awareness about how other people perform a task in certain situations (Aranaiz Sanchez et al., 2019). Since individuals do not always have sufficient ways of evaluating their capabilities, sometimes they need to compare their capabilities to others in order to recognize

their capabilities (Dea & Negassa, 2019). Most of the participants spoke of their vicarious experiences in a similar fashion. Shaun stated he frequently speaks to his “colleagues to inquire how they make their classrooms more successful” (Shaun, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Corvin stated that when he struggles with success in his inclusive classroom, he will often visit other classrooms to watch his colleagues and how “teach different inclusive tactics” and this helps him to feel more “committed to overcoming” his own challenges (Corvin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Teachers’ vicarious experiences increase their self-efficacy, which is an important construct that increases teacher commitment (Block et al., 2010).

Environmental Factors Can Impact the Success of Inclusion. Self-efficacy can be negatively or positively impacted by factors not related to the educator themselves, also referred to as environmental or external factors. The school environment can therefore impact an educator’s self-efficacy, and ultimately the success of inclusion. If a school environment has a perceived high collective efficacy and the climate promotes mainstream education, then this can foster an educator’s own self- efficacy (Wilson, 2018). If an educator sees the school as a whole having success with inclusion, then he or she will have an increased self-efficacy and a more positive attitude with it. Conversely, if an educator sees a school climate that is not promoting inclusive education, then this can cause a lowered self-efficacy. Renee stated that when some of her “colleagues speak negatively on inclusion” she also starts to think “negatively” (Renee, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While, Pat stated that having a “kitchen that is not always accessible for students who need accommodations” makes him feel like he really cannot teach “those students successfully” (Pat, Focus Group, June 30, 2022).

External influences that can impact the self-efficacy of educators include other stakeholders in education, such as administration. A positive attitude from the administration can

help foster a collective school-wide high self-efficacy, and therefore help the educator form a high self-efficacy (Wilson, 2018). David stated that when “administration lacks consistent policies” specifically, current policies for behavior, or classroom expectations, that help manage the diverse group of students, “it makes it harder” for his classroom to succeed” (David, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). While Rachel stated that she “feels like a failure” when administration mentions her “high number of failing students”, but will not help offer her “techniques for fixing it” (Rachel, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Administrators are stakeholders in education that assist the teacher through collaborations, and therefore can help lower an educator’s self-efficacy (Kendall, 2019).

Other external factors that can impact the self-efficacy of the educator is the environment and available resources in that environment. Many educators feel that large class size (Walker et al., 2018) and assistive resources (Sirota, 2017) impedes their ability to differentiate for all students, and hinders them from differentiating properly. Corvin stated that he currently has a class of “28 students all with varying needs” and that to teach a class that large in the timeframe he has means that not “every child is getting the help or challenge that they deserve” (Corvin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). For David, finding and funding assistive technologies like “text-to-speech software for every student that needs it, is impossible” and therefore not all students are receiving the “accommodations they need in order to learn properly” (David, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Stephanie related that most students who use assistive technologies like text-to-speech, “refuse to use them in large classrooms because they do not want to stand out from their peers” (Stephanie, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Large class sizes coupled with lack of modern assistive technologies in the teaching and learning process can lower a teacher’s self-efficacy (Asemanyi, 2015).

External factors that influence the educator's self-efficacy and successful inclusion also include state mandated curriculums. If a curriculum is flexible so that educators can make modifications, then there is a higher chance of success within the inclusive classrooms (MoKaleng & Mowes, 2020). Jillian stated that Massachusetts has a curriculum "that is too rigid and centralized that fails to reflect the diversity of learners" (Jillian, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). Tammy feels like she is in a "race each year" because she has to "finish the curriculum before the state's standardized test" (Tammy, Focus Group, June 30, 2022). This curriculum is therefore too content heavy (Sharma et al., 2017), and therefore is not flexible enough for inclusive classrooms, which has a negative impact on the learning outcomes and success of the students.

Implications

The findings for this phenomenological explored the teacher's lived experience with self-efficacy teaching to inclusive classrooms in a vocational secondary school. This section presents the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. The 15 participants described their self-efficacy as fluctuating and informed by their current experiences and prior experiences with inclusion. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications are discussed in the subsections below.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that guided this phenomenological research study was Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to perform behaviors necessary to succeed in a situation (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, an individual's self-efficacy is attained based on mastery of experience, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977). The findings of this

study lends additional support for previous research findings on teacher self-efficacy beliefs and inclusion (e.g., Barni et al., 2019; Keil et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020) and gives further insight into how a teacher's belief in their ability to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom can improve their performance.

Furthermore, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory states that individuals with high self-efficacy persevere in the face of adversity, and that self-efficacy influences one's individual choice of activities, the amount of effort one will expend on an activity, and how long a person is willing to engage in a stressful activity. As suggested by Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory concerning those with high self-efficacy beliefs, findings from this study revealed that educators who are confident believe they are capable and are committed to implement inclusive strategies within their inclusive vocational classrooms.

The results of this study suggest that educators' experience with self-efficacy aligned with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Specifically, teachers experienced increased self-efficacy through mastery experience, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion. Educators gained mastery experience through prior trainings, outside sources, and repeated exposure to the inclusive classroom. When educators had repeated success with their experiences, their self-efficacy was elevated.

Educators experienced a sense of performance accomplishment when they had repeated student success within their inclusive classrooms. These findings supported Bandura's (1977) theory that the successful accomplishment of individual performance establishes a healthy confidence in one's personal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Mastery experience increased the teacher's self-efficacy for teaching to inclusive vocational schools, and self-efficacy is related to teacher commitment (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Previous studies (e.g., Block et al., 2010:

Carmargo et al., 2016; Griffith et al., 2019; Pocock & Miyahara 2018; Yeo et al., 2016) corroborate the importance of mastery experiences for the development of teacher self-efficacy.

The study confirmed Bandura's (1977) suggestion that vicarious experiences increase self-efficacy. Teacher's vicarious experiences revolved around observing other teachers and students succeeding in inclusive classrooms. Teachers can judge their own capabilities against educators in similar situations, and this can influence their perceived self-efficacy (Liver et al., 2019; Nia, 2020; Woodcock & Jones, 2020). Once teachers observed and perceived their peers as succeeding, their self-efficacy increased, and it gave them the confidence that they could succeed.

The study confirmed Bandura's (1977) explanation that verbal persuasion enhances self-efficacy. Teachers experience verbal persuasion through one another, and administration. Verbal persuasion is defined as appraisal or evaluative feedback from others (Pearman et al., 2021), and can increase perceptions of self-efficacy. When teachers received negative verbalizations from their peers or administration, they were more adapting to have a negative self-efficacy.

Empirical Implications

The majority of literature on teacher self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms is on traditional primary schools. Little is done on secondary schools, and very little with vocational schools (Ab Halim et al., 2019; Adhirkari et al., 2018; Casale-Giannola, 2012; Gashi & Moksoska-Blazevski, 2016; Ozbek et al., 2017; Theoblad et al., 2018). The findings of this study have empirical implications by contributing to the limited amount of evidence available on teachers' experience with self-efficacy teaching in inclusive vocational classes. Educator self-efficacy in vocational schools has diminished since the introduction of inclusive classrooms for several reasons: changing role of the special education educator (Eisenman et al., 2011), the selectiveness of

mainstream education (Van Pragg et al., 2017), and the negative attitude of the vocational educators towards inclusion (Ozbek et al., 2017).

The majority of participants in this study reported an overall high self-efficacy for teaching to inclusive vocational classrooms. They also reported that their self-efficacy was due to current experiences, prior experiences, and training. They did report negative environmental factors that hindered their classroom experiences; however, it was not negatively perceived. This was due to the fact that the majority of participants had multiple years of experience in the role, and they overwhelmingly felt that experience was the best professional development.

The participants of this study stated that the changing roles and demands required for inclusive classrooms were stressful, but that did not impact the educators negatively. The participants reported feeling overwhelmed some days, but stated collaborations with their peers, experience, and professional development helped. The participants also stated that the selectiveness of mainstream education in vocational education was still a problem, strictly due to the demands that certain vocations held. The lack of physical accommodations for selective vocations makes it difficult to mainstream, and that can hinder the learning process. The majority of the participants of this study had biases concerning full inclusion and was against the lack of a continuum of alternative placements. However, their biases and negative attitudes did not seem to impede their self-efficacy and successful inclusive education.

Practical Implications

The findings of this phenomenological study yielded significant policy and practical implications in relation to teacher self-efficacy. These recommendations are intended to support the education professionals. First implications for policies to support educator and students are

discussed. Then recommendations for general education teachers are stated to help them build their self-efficacy for inclusive education.

Implications for Policy

This research study has several policy implications for inclusive vocational schools. These policy implications surround encouraging teacher growth with confidence in teaching to inclusive classrooms. While the study did not focus on administrative decisions directly, a profile of what leads to successful inclusion became clear.

Provide Time for Planning. Administrators must allow for ample planning time so that educators have access to learn vicariously from the experiences of their colleagues. Allowing educators time to talk with their colleagues and co-teachers, or to observe their colleagues in successful inclusive situations, allows for those teachers to increase their self-efficacy. For example, Corvin stated that when he struggles with success in his inclusive classroom, he will often visit other classrooms to observe his colleagues and learn how to “teach different inclusive tactics” and this helps him to feel more “committed to overcoming” his own challenges (Corvin, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). By safeguarding teacher planning time, districts will provide an essential observational tactic aimed at encouraging vicarious learning experiences. Self-efficacy is important for better job commitment and job satisfaction among teachers (Huang et al., 2019).

Provide Policies for Smaller Class Sizes. Policies should be considered for the number of students within a classroom, especially for an inclusion classroom. Many educators feel that large class sizes impede their ability to differentiate their instruction for all students (Walker et al., 2018). Shaun stated that having “large class sizes means I cannot give every student the attention they need to really understand the material” (Shaun Personal Communication, May 25,

2022). While Rachel stated that “having large class sizes makes it harder for classroom management in a class that already has emotional, intellectual, and behavioral issues” (Rachel, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Large class sizes mean that educators have limited time to spend with each student (Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020), and when individual instruction is fundamental to the success of inclusive education, educators end up compromising academic quality.

Provide More Professional Development Opportunities. A teacher’s level of qualifications has direct implications for instructional practices. Educators with more specialized training in special education have a more positive perception of classroom success using inclusive practices (Kwon et al., 2017). Linda stated that she has taken “several courses in special education” and has had to seek out her own “professional development courses to keep me up to date on some of the latest teaching models” (Linda, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). Offering educators the chance to have professional development and to stay up to date on latest inclusive practices increases their self-efficacy and shows them that administrators are seeking to help and equip them with the skills and strategies need to support all students.

Implications for Practice

The research study provided practical implications for educators as well. This study found that teachers gained self-efficacy through their commitment to the practice, their personal experiences, and the experience of their colleagues. Teachers want to be effective in inclusive classrooms. However, teachers with reduced self-efficacy may not view themselves as effective because of preconceived cognitions of self-doubt fueled by stress of perceptions of their failing classrooms. The practical implications aim to promote measures that increase self-efficacy in the classroom.

Utilize Observations. The first practical implication is to encourage teachers to utilize their planning periods for observations of their colleagues. Observing colleagues who have successful inclusive practices allows for the educators to not only learn methods for better inclusive practices (Wilson, 2018), but also allows educators to learn from these vicarious experiences and increase their self-efficacy. Shaun stated that he co-teaches his vocational shop, and often he will “pop” his head into “other classes to see how our shared students function with different instructional techniques” (Shaun, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022).

Collaborate with Colleagues. The participants in this study valued the knowledge and opinions of their peers. When educators collaborate, they build a relationship with their colleagues. Relationship building increases self-efficacy through verbal persuasion. Relationships from collaborations can provide a platform where teachers can receive or offer words of encouragement to each other, and this encouragement can increase self-efficacy and strengthen commitment to teaching. Kevin stated that he has built a strong friendship with a special education teacher in his building, and he often “bounces ideas off of him” (Kevin, Focus Group, June 30, 2022) and will receive praise from him when those ideas prosper.

Seek Professional Development in Areas You are Challenged In. Education is constantly changing; new teaching techniques are being discovered, new research is being disseminated daily. Staying up to date can really help offer experiences for one to increase their self-efficacy. Emilia stated that she reads “current scientific research in education and science” at least once a week to look for “upcoming trends or practices” (Emilia, Personal Communication, May 25, 2022). When educators take courses, professional developments, or read articles that integrate special education studies the results lead to a stronger self-efficacy of educators in including and integrating pupils with special needs (Shani & Hebel, 2016).

Delimitations and Limitations

All research studies have inherent limitations and delimitations. Limitations are uncontrollable influences that impact a research study, and there are several in this study. For example, this study was limited geographically because it focused on one vocational school. This study had to be completed within the chosen geographic area because it is in the proximity of where I reside, and there are no other fully inclusive vocational schools in the area. Another limitation is that the study has a small sample size, which may not be generalizable to a larger population of teaching in vocational education. The study was limited due to size of the school and the number of participants willing to participate, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus groups and many of the personal interviews had to be conducted over zoom. The study also had ethnicity limitations. Every individual who volunteered to participate in this study was Caucasian.

Delimitations are exclusionary decisions that establish the boundaries of a study (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). Several delimitations limited the scope for the boundaries of this study. This study focused on the educators' shared experience with self-efficacy teaching inclusive vocational classrooms. Purposeful criterion sampling was used when selecting participants. Participants had to be an educator for at least one full year in an inclusive classrooms at the selected location. Participants needed to be fulltime, certified educators in order to ensure they met the criteria set forth. Any individuals holding a teaching license in the state of Massachusetts had to have a required educational background.

The study needed to be qualitative in nature in order to discern the meaning that teachers attributed to their experiences with self-efficacy and how the teachers constructed meaning from those lived experiences. If a quantitative method was chosen for this study, then the study would

not have been able to provide a detailed understanding of the lived experiences. Since the purpose of this study was to focus on how teachers experienced a lived experience in relation to a shared phenomenon, a quantitative study would not have worked. A transcendental approach was chosen specifically because it allowed the researcher to suspend biases through epoche and bracketing in order to focus on participants' description of their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

This transcendental phenomenological research study sought to gain a deeper understanding of educators' lived experience with self-efficacy teaching in an inclusive vocational secondary school. The participants in this study consisted of 15 educators who taught in inclusive classrooms in a vocational school in Western Massachusetts. Further research should be conducted to include more inclusive vocational schools, multiple districts, and an overall wider geographical area. Further research should focus on comparing different participant sets within differing states as well.

Further research should also look at discerning the shared experiences of just vocational educators, and not academic educators. Vocational educators and academic educators require different licensures for teaching in Massachusetts, and therefore discerning the differences with self-efficacy between academic and vocational teachers could be of importance. In the State of Massachusetts, Vocational educators are not required to take the same educational college courses to obtain their licensure, and therefore never acquire the same confidence in educating students with disabilities.

There is still a considerable gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of secondary teachers in fully inclusive classrooms. Most of the research focuses on primary schools.

Therefore, research just seeking to explain the lived experiences of secondary teachers within fully inclusive education would also be beneficial.

There are also gaps in literature concerning the lived experiences of administrators in fully inclusive schools- primary, secondary, and vocational. A qualitative study seeking to describe the lived experiences of administrators would also be beneficial. This would allow for policies to be created and practices identified that could enhance the climate to better support inclusive education.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore educators' lived experience with self-efficacy in an inclusive vocational secondary school in a public rural school district in Western Massachusetts. The theoretical framework for this study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy which informed the study's four research questions. A self-efficacy survey, individual interviews, and focus groups were used to answer the research questions. Fifteen vocational educators from a secondary school in Massachusetts were purposefully selected to describe their lived experience with self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms.

Data analysis and synthesis followed the methods outlined by Moustakas (1994). The findings from the triangulation of all data produced four primary themes and 10 sub-themes during data analysis. The primary themes were successful inclusion, prior experience, awareness, and school environment. The subthemes were success of students, experiences outside the classroom, training, biases, achievement gap, changing efficacies, small class sizes, greater accessibility to resources, administrative support, and school climate.

This study found that teachers' self-efficacy in teaching inclusive vocational classrooms fluctuated and is informed by their classroom experiences, prior experiences, and school environment. Educators experience with self-efficacy aligned with Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, specifically with mastery experience, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion. Teachers experienced increased self-efficacy through prior trainings and experiences (mastery experiences), through vicarious experiences (collaborations and observations), and through verbal persuasion (collaborations with colleagues and administrators), manifesting in their commitment to educate each student in their inclusive classroom.

Despite the high self-efficacy survey ratings, all teachers in this study reported to being against full inclusion and support a continuum of alternative placement options as mandated by IDEA (2004). The findings and implications of this study suggest that vocational schools should embrace policies on reduced class sizes, more time for teacher planning, and more opportunities for ongoing professional development on inclusive practices. The findings and implications of this study also suggest educators seek vicarious experiences related to effective teaching students with disabilities, to seek out professional development about effective instruction with students with disabilities, and to collaborate with experienced and knowledgeable peers who can not only offer good advice but also provide technical and/or pedagogical guidance when needed.

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APPENDIX A

Part 1-Demographic information: Please complete the following questions about yourself by placing a checkmark next to the correct demographic:

1. I am

- Male
 Female

2. What is your age?

- 25 years or below
 26-35 years
 36-45 years
 46 years and above

3. My highest level of education completed is:

- Secondary School or its equivalent
 Bachelor's Degree or its equivalent
 Master's Degree
 Bachelor's Degree in Special Education
 Master's degree in Special Education
 Ed.D/Ph.D

4. Currently, I teach the following subject / subjects:

- English
 Math
 Science
 Social Studies/history
 Computer science/ Robotics/Engineering
 Vocation

5. Total years of Teaching Experience (The number of years you have been employed under contract as a teacher including current year)

- 0-5
 6-10
 11-15
 16-20
 21 and more

6. Areas of Certification you hold, select all that apply:

- Elementary Education (K-5)
 Middle Level Education (6-8)
 Secondary Level Education (9-12)
 Math
 Science
 Social Studies
 Language Arts
 Vocation
 Special Education

7. How many higher education courses have you completed in special education?

- None
 1-3
 4 or more

8. Have you attended in-service training in special education?

- Yes
 No

Part 2-Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Scale- This part of the survey is designed to help understand the nature of factors influencing the success of routine classroom activities in creating an inclusive classroom environment. Please rate your degree of agreement by choosing and circling one of the 2 anchors that best reflects your agreement with each statement.

1. I can make my expectations clear about student behavior.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
2. I am able to calm a student who is disruptive/noisy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
3. I can make parents feel comfortable coming to school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
4. I can assist families in helping their children do well in school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
5. I can accurately gauge student comprehension of what I have taught.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
6. I can provide appropriate challenges for very capable students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
7. I am confident in my ability to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom before it occurs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
8. I can control disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
9. I am confident in my ability to get parents involved in school activities of their children with disabilities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
10. I am confident in designing learning tasks so that the individual needs of students with disabilities are accommodated.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------

Part 3-Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) Scale- This part of the survey is designed to help understand the of factors influencing the success of routine classroom activities in creating an inclusive classroom environment. Please rate your degree of agreement by choosing and circling one of the two anchors that best reflects your agreement with each statement.

1. I am able to get children to follow classroom rules.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
2. I can collaborate with other professionals (e.g. itinerant teachers/speech pathologists) in designing educational plans for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
3. I am able to work jointly with other professionals and staff (e.g. aides, other teachers) to teach students with disabilities in the classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
4. I am confident in my ability to get students to work together in pairs/in small groups.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure
-----------------------	--------------	-----------------	--------------------------	-----------------
5. I can use a variety of assessment strategies (e.g. portfolio assessment,

modified tests, performance based assessment, etc.).

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure

6. I am confident in informing others who know little about laws and policies related to the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure

7. I am confident when dealing with students who are physically aggressive.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure

8. I am able to provide an alternate explanation/example when students are confused.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree Not sure

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

PUBLIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY STUDY

Amber Jean Caproni
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study highlighting the differing environmental factors that are perceived as beneficial to inclusive vocational classrooms. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher of an inclusive vocational institution. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Amber Caproni, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: 1.) Participate in a short online survey, which will determine your demographic credibility for the study, and highlight your perceived self-efficacy for instructing inclusive classroom. 2.) Participate in a 30-60 minute interview and follow up. One-on-one interviews were audio taped to ensure verbatim

transcriptions. Follow up interviews are necessary to establish credibility for the participant's narrative. Transcriptions were included and each participant will be allowed to read their responses and field notes for accuracy. 3.) Participate in a 30-60 minute focus group interview. These interviews will be audio taped to ensure verbatim transcription. A follow up will be necessary to establish credibility for your narrative.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks for this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation:

You will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Research records and recordings will be stored securely and password protected, and only the researcher will have access to the hardcopies, which will be kept in a locked cabinet. All data collected is strictly confidential, and pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address below. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Amber Caproni. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu. Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. (NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.) The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Permission to Conduct Research Study Letter

January 20, 2022

Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District
McCann Technical School
70 Hodges Cross Road
North Adams, Massachusetts, 01247

Dear Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Special Education. The title of my research project is *Public Vocational School Teachers' Experiences and Perceived Self-Efficacy in Working with Students with Disabilities in an Inclusive Environment: A Phenomenological Inquiry Study*, and the purpose of my research is to contribute to the current body of literature on the perceived factors that influence successful inclusive classrooms in a vocational school. The study will use the *Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices* (TEIP) scale developed by Sharma et al. (2011), and a variety of interviews, and focus groups.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at your institution, and the ability to contact faculty and staff to invite them to participate in my research study. Potential teacher participants will be asked through email and will receive information about the study, and the expectations, or requirements. All participants will be informed that the data collected in the study will be used to show shared experiences of inclusive classrooms. The data could also potentially show the connection between factors that influence the success of inclusive classrooms. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on approved letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,

Amber J. Caproni, Ph.D.

Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix D

Recruitment Email

[Date]

Northern Berkshire Vocational Regional School District
McCann Technical School
70 Hodges Cross Road
North Adams, Massachusetts, 01247

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe what the experiences are that shape the self-efficacy of general education vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms in Massachusetts, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age, teach within your facility, and have taught to a fully inclusive classroom for at least one year. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an online survey, face-to-face interview, and a small focus group. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey, 30 minutes to complete the interview, and another 30 minutes for the focus groups to be completed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please [Click Here](#) and complete the attached survey. Feel free to contact me at

[REDACTED]

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link above to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Amber J. Caproni, Ph.D.
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate
Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix E

Consent Form

Title of the Project: PUBLIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY STUDY

Principal Investigator: Amber Caproni, Ph.D. Student candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a current fulltime, licensed educator at the designated study site. You must be currently teaching a fully inclusive classroom and have at least one year of prior experience teaching to fully inclusive classrooms. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences that shape the self-efficacy of vocational educators teaching students with disabilities in rural inclusive vocational classrooms. The purpose is to understand what you think helps or hinders a successful fully inclusive classroom.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. The first method of data collection will be the use of an adapted *Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices* (TEIP) scale developed by Sharma et al. (2011). This will take about 10-20 minutes to take.
2. The second method will be participation in personal interviews. To ensure confidentiality, these interviews will not be conducted during work hours and will be conducted offsite, specifically at the local University's library. Since the pandemic is still an issue, if you choose you can participate in the interview through an online format, like Microsoft Teams. This semi-structured method will be recorded and should take between 30-45 minutes.
3. The third method consists of a focus group of five to six people. Focus groups will also be held in an offsite setting, specifically at the local University's library. Due to the current pandemic, you can also choose to participate through an online format like Microsoft teams. This semi-structured method will be recorded and should take between 30-45 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. The indirect benefits to the educators completing the study will be that possible reoccurring themes of inclusive success could help them in reshaping the fully inclusive classrooms so that they could be more successful.

Liberty University
IRB-FY21-22-747
Approved on 3-23-2022

Appendix F

Audit Trail

Date	Entry
3/23/2022	Received IRB Approval
3/25/2022	Recruitment Email sent seeking participants
5/1/2022	Responses received from recruitment email, with consents and Self-efficacy Survey
5/25/2022	Began conducting interviews with audio and video recordings. Most were done through Zoom.
5/26/2022	Transcription of interviews transcribed with NVivo
5/28/2022	Transcriptions were emailed to participants for approval
6/30/2022	Conducted audio and video recordings of focus groups. All were done through Zoom.
7/1/2022	Focus groups transcriptions were transcribed with NVivo.
7/20/2022	Coding and thematic development began with NVivo

Appendix G

Date	Entry
5/25/2022	Suspended all presuppositions and biases about inclusive education and vocational education prior to conducting each interview.
5/26/2022	Suspended all presuppositions and biases about inclusive education and vocational education prior to transcribing each interview.
6/30/2022	Suspended all presuppositions and biases about inclusive education and vocational education prior to conducting focus groups
7/1/2022	Suspended all presuppositions and biases about inclusive education and vocational education prior to transcribing each focus group
7/20/2022	Suspended all presuppositions and biases about inclusive education and vocational education prior to coding
8/1/2022	Suspended all presuppositions ad biases about inclusive education and vocational education during initial code development from interviews, and the focus group
8/10/2022	Suspended all presuppositions ad biases about inclusive education and vocational education during open code development from interviews, and the focus group

Appendix H

Initial Codes

1. Teacher
2. Student
3. Support
4. Training
5. Education
6. Classes
7. Level
8. Assessments
9. Needs of an inclusive class
10. Time
11. Observation
12. Academic support classes
13. experiences
14. responses
15. help
16. school instruction
17. special education background
18. formal training
19. successful inclusive classroom
20. trade
21. professional
22. development
23. understanding
24. medium confidence
25. tests
26. observation methods
27. environment
28. career
29. evaluation
30. services
31. data
32. achievement
33. staff
34. gap
35. peer
36. student needs
37. student understanding
38. student data
39. skill levels
40. grade levels
41. special education students
42. traditional students

43. college-bound students
44. teaching students
45. school-aged students
46. classroom climate
47. classroom management
48. successful inclusive classroom
49. effective inclusive classroom
50. consistent school norms
51. consistent school policies
52. school community
53. prior teaching experience
54. class average
55. class materials
56. second-hand learning
57. specific experience
58. extensive experience
59. tracking students
60. skill level
61. academic skill level
62. set deadlines
63. effective support staff
64. IEP accommodations
65. IEP
66. Learning skills
67. Learning expectations

Appendix I

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and share why you chose to become an educator.
2. What indicates a successful inclusive classroom to you?
3. What prior training have you had in teaching to inclusive classrooms?
4. What prior teaching experiences or second-hand learning experiences (e.g., through observing or reading about others' experiences) have you had with inclusive education?
5. How are students with educational needs included as full participants in your facility?
6. What types of resources or supports are available for your inclusive classroom?
7. What supports do you think are needed for your inclusive classroom? How often are they given?
8. What is your class size and the range/characteristics of the students with disabilities in your inclusive classroom?
9. Which environmental factors (e.g., school norms/climate/expectations, materials/resources, collegial/administrative support, etc.), do you think make teaching in an inclusive classrooms harder or easier?
10. How has your confidence level for teaching to inclusive classrooms changed since you began teaching to inclusive classrooms? What factors or specific experiences helped influence any changes to your current confidence level?
11. What positive experiences and advice would you share/give to teachers about working with students with disabilities in an inclusive setting?
12. What cautionary advice would you give to teachers about teaching in an inclusive classroom setting?
13. What are your thoughts about the field of education's desire to fully include *all* students with disabilities into the general classroom versus IDEA's requirement to maintain a diversity/continuum of placement options to address a diversity of knowledge and skills?
14. When faced with a behavior or instructional problem in your classroom, how do you deal with it? Are you confident in seeking out technical assistance from colleagues or do you attempt to solve it on your own because you do not want to be perceived as an ineffective teacher?

15. When first placed in an inclusive classroom, what did you do to prepare and what advice do you have for new teachers in this setting?

16. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me pertaining to teaching in an inclusive classroom environment?

Appendix J

Focus Group Questions

1. Please share how you came to be a teacher here at this Career and Technical Vocational school.
2. What assessment/observation methods could be used to objectively measure the success of an inclusive classroom?
3. Who feels they have a strong or high level of confidence in teaching to inclusive classrooms, and why do you think that is?
4. How has your training in inclusive classrooms differed or varied from your colleagues and from these differences, which training experiences do you think are the most beneficial?
5. What common academic supports are found within the group's inclusive classrooms and from these supports which ones do you most need or least need?
6. Do you think inclusive education has effectively (or nearly) closed the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel that, in the process of promoting inclusive education, we may have underestimated the severity of the learning problems of students with disabilities. What are your thoughts on this as a possibility?
8. Do you feel that, in the process of promoting inclusive education, we may have over-estimated our instructional capacity to address the learning needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. What are your thoughts on this as a possibility?
9. In your opinion and experience, what are the most impactful environmental factors/strategies (e.g., student's social peer network, collegial and administrative support, professional

materials/training) for promoting the success of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?

10. In your opinion and experience, what are the least impactful environmental factors/strategies (e.g., student's social peer network, collegial and administrative support, professional materials/training) for promoting the success of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?