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BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BASED ON PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Bianca Zubia

BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BASED ON PERCEPTIONS OF

STAKEHOLDERS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

_____

By

Bianca Zubia

May 2023

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Approved By

Dr. Carmen Beck, Committee Chair

Dr. Angela Louque, Committee Member

Dr. Daniel Martinez, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore the best practices for inclusive education perceived by teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents. It was designed to identify: (a) training (b) resources (c) frameworks (d) instructional practices (e) classroom strategies (f) administrator attributes that support inclusive education.

Methodology. This qualitative case study research design study used a semi-structured interview protocol to explore the best practices of twenty participants. Five participants from each group were selected. Through the use of a qualitative case study, the researcher wanted to explore the experiences of the participants through rich dialogue.

Findings. Through this study, nine best practices that were deemed best among the four groups: (a) training on instructional practices (b) training on special education (c) training on inclusion (d) training on models of inclusion, (e) planning time, (f) peer modeling as an instructional practice (g) expectations (h) administrators advocate for inclusion (i) supportive administrators.

Conclusion. Inclusive education is the practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering, and supporting all students, as a whole child in shared environments and experiences. The best practices discovered in this study provide insight into training, resources, instructional practices, classroom community, and leadership attributes to support inclusive education. However, these practices should not be limited to just educators. When it comes to

inclusive education, it's about the team behind the child. It's teamwork and collaboration between teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents to ensure all students are adequately prepared to be functional members in society.

Recommendations. School districts should assess and monitor the implementation process of inclusive education to incorporate necessary components to ensure success for students, staff, families, and administrators. Further research could focus on examining the correlation between frameworks and which one is most successful with inclusive education. Adding to the body of research on this significant group will provide greater understanding of their unique experiences. The data this study adds to the understanding of inclusive education best practices and the support required to promote student success will further the progression of inclusivity.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Yolie Barrera. Doing this
journey without you has been one of the hardest things I have done. I miss our
phone calls and you proofreading my college papers. I hope I am making you
proud and accomplishing everything you hoped I would. Thank you for being the
role model you were and always showing me that hard things were possible. Not
a day goes by that I don't feel your presence guiding me and showing me the
right path. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There is a need to understand the most effective practices of inclusive education to the current reality at the school sites (Sloik, 2018). Teachers should have access to adequate training and resources to ensure that inclusive education benefits the needs of the students (Emerson et al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Cooper et al., 2008). Further supporting collaboration among stakeholders and policymakers from different backgrounds becomes imperative, allowing multiple perspectives to emerge to create a solution that would benefit all students (Francisco et al., 2020; Webster, 2014; Obiakor et al., 2012). Some studies suggest there is a need to promote the effectiveness of inclusive education, social inclusion as well as physical integration, which would prepare all students for their integration into the diverse society (Darling-Hammond et al., & Osher, 2020; Villa & Thousand, 2016). This study will identify the best practices from the perception of different stakeholders. Research has determined that inclusive education has substantial benefits for not only students with disabilities but all students (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Webster, 2014; Hicks-Monroe, 2011).

It is apparent from the research that inclusive education will not thrive without the appropriate administrative support or leadership (Murphy, 2018; Sloik, 2018; Brendle et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2008; Leatherman, 2007). An inclusive leader is needed to implement inclusive education successfully, and this

leader must possess specific attributes that would allow for effective leadership

(Tapia & Polonskaia, 2020; Murphy, 2018). Therefore, in this study, the

researcher will identify the most relevant attributes perceived by different

stakeholders.

Overall, a common understanding of the best practices that promote

implementing an effective inclusion program must be understood. There needs to

be a clear definition of what inclusive education is. Still, for this study, the working

definition of inclusive education is educating all students in the same room and

supporting them to reach their full potential to lead productive lives (Somma &

Bennett, 2020; Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Although many studies suggest that

professional development for teachers is necessary, there needs to be an

agreement on what that should entail (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Emerson et

al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Also, we know that administrators can

positively influence efforts, but there needs to be alignment in specific skills or

attributes (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Faraclas, 2018; Cooper et al., 2008).

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Despite the influx in inclusive practices, there is no agreement on which

specific resources, training, or support related to inclusive education are vital to

allow the current students with disabilities to be taught in regular education

classrooms (Faraclas, 2018; Hines, 2001). Hayes and Bulat (2017) found that

many stakeholders find it challenging to develop and seek recommendations on

implementing inclusive education and find examples of proven good practices in

<center>2</center>

inclusive education reform. The researchers determined that the reason for these challenges is that no common concept of inclusive education applies across all context areas. However, it may be defined, there should be an understanding of the most critical factors related to inclusive education (Hayes & Bulat, 2017).

For this study, inclusive education will be defined as educating special education students in the same room as general education students and supporting them to reach their full potential to lead productive lives (Somma & Bennett, 2020; Hayes & Bulat, 2017).

Another factor discussed in this research relates to the most effective components of teacher preparation for the inclusive approach to be effective. Several studies confirm that all teachers must clearly understand special education policies and procedures to ensure classroom implementation (Alexander & Byrd, 2020; Francisco et al., 2020; Murphy, 2017). There needs to be an agreement on which professional development strategies should be mastered by teachers who work in inclusive schools.

Along with providing access to quality professional development to teachers, it has been found that administrators and leaders need to cultivate a positive climate for everyone (Murphy, 2018). The key is to find out how administrative support or leadership practices impact the implementation of inclusive education (Faraclas, 2018).

One factor that is common among several studies suggests that collaboration between special education and general education teachers is an

essential factor in providing the best instruction for students with all needs, along with adequate support from the administration (Bannister-Tyrrel et al., 2018; Webster, 2014; Met Life, 2010; Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Currently, a limited amount of research has examined the factors that support inclusive practices in the general education classroom (Bannister-Tyrrel, et al., 2018). Results from Leatherman (2007) and Gregory (2018) showed that more teachers would like to receive training to implement inclusive practices.

Superintendents have also expressed the need for general education teachers to strengthen their skills in teaching children with different needs (Cooper et al., 2008). The impact of the general education teacher is a crucial component in the success of inclusive practices in education. However, their lack of knowledge and skills hinders their ability to address diverse needs (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). General education and special education teachers should be seen as collaborative practitioners that create a mutual vision that will benefit the needs of all students (Cooper et al., 2008). Considering the lack of current research in this area, there is a need to explore further the perceptions of individuals closely related to inclusive education.

Background of Problem

Education has to be more than teaching the standards or teaching to a test. Teaching should nurture all students' cultures, skills, and prior knowledge. Providing opportunities for students to be around peers with various needs and abilities will ultimately cultivate compassion, growth, and knowledge, all of which

are key to functioning in today's society (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Villa & Thousand, 2016; Katz & Mirenda, 2002). In the classroom, it is more likely that there will be students with disabilities, English language learners, and those who are gifted or talented; that is what makes education "special" (Francisco et al., 2020). Due to the various learners, there is a need for inclusion (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

<u>Inclusion</u>

The National Center in Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) defined inclusion as providing equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services to all students, including those with severe disabilities. This education must be provided with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighboring school to better prepare all students for productive lives as full members of the society (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995.) Inclusion is a continuous journey that involves many adaptations and changes to address the unique needs of all students (Villa & Thousand, 2016; Ross-Hill, 2009). The idea of inclusion does not occur overnight but increasingly occurs within the school systems (Francisco et al., 2020).

<u>Inclusion and Special Education</u>

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education as specifically designated instruction that addresses the learning needs of an individual with disabilities that is no cost to families (IDEA, 2019).

Throughout history, special education has progressed toward more inclusion regarding students with unique needs (Francisco et al., 2020; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Special education began with institutionalization, where all students with disabilities were segregated from the rest of society (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Then progressed to "segregated integration," where students with disabilities were taught in special classrooms separated from their general education peers in the same school setting (Francisco et al., 2020). The next phase was the integration of mainstreaming and normalization, where students were invited to join the general education classrooms for portions of the day (Chauhan & Mantry, 2018). Lastly, there has been an increase in inclusive practices in school settings (Francisco et al., 2020; Chauhan & Mantry, 2018).

<u>Inclusive Education</u>

Special education has adapted to meet the needs of students through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other pivotal changes in laws or policy. However, education is needed in the least restrictive environment (Western Governors University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008; IDEA, 2004). This marks the beginning of inclusive education in our schools. Historically, our education system was not structured for inclusive education. Even today, many of our schools still allow for a "pull-out" method or segregated placements that removes students from the general education setting (Giangreco, 2020; Sloik, 2018). Removal from the general education classroom occurs because of

inconsistent practices regarding how inclusive education is understood or implemented (Obiakor et al., 2012).

In addition to the change in the history of special education, the perceptions of special education have also evolved (Francisco et al., 2020). Teacher education and administrative programs encourage a more inclusive classroom environment that will highlight individual potential with proper support (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Educators are aware of the benefits that inclusive education brings forth. However, there needs to be a clear understanding of what support or resources would make inclusive education possible (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Gregory, 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Leatherman, 2007).

Purpose Statement

This study aims to explore which best practices are perceived to be the most successful in inclusive education. More specifically, identifying what stakeholders deemed the best educational leadership practices, what resources are needed, and which professional development strategies are most effective regarding inclusive education. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge on inclusive education. The findings can be utilized to address a gap in the literature, which does not address the needs of a school site, specifically educational leadership practices, training, and resources toward inclusive education. The participants in this study will provide valuable insights as to what is needed to promote a successful inclusive school.

Understanding the history, perceptions, preparation, and leadership

practices related to inclusive education will be essential to create a more

sustainable education for all students. Practitioners at all levels, such as district

personnel, school leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, educational staff,

families, and community members, would benefit from the findings of this

research. It could be used to strengthen inclusive education. The findings could

also serve as the start of conversations to reflect and improve as educators,

administrators, and school leaders and enhance preparation programs.

Additionally, findings could impact the revision and establishment of new policies.

Research Questions

1. In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact
   on an effective inclusive program?
2. Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on
   positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?
3. Which leadership attributes have the biggest impact on positive student
   outcomes for an inclusive school program?
4. What are the common perceptions about best practices for inclusive
   education among the four groups: teachers, admin, staff, and parents?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will highlight the necessary resources, training,

and administrative support needed to support inclusive education effectively.

Additionally, it will determine how administration plays a role in inclusive

practices in K-12 education. The greater demand for inclusive practices confirms

the need for more effective practices that address philosophical issues and research-based pedagogy (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Stephenson et al., 2012). It will be vital for schools and districts to consider the research and determine resources or a potential framework on what is currently working and not working in inclusive education (Choi et al., 2020; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Cooper et al., 2008;).

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

Three theories will be reviewed that provides a vital framework for inclusive education. These theories provide knowledge of how individuals learn, what is needed for successful learning, what are the basic needs of individuals, and organizational change. All three theories support an inclusive student, staff, and family environment.

<u>Social Constructivist Theory</u>

Vygotsky considered learning a collaborative process where children can perform competently when provided scaffolding from adults to achieve the same common goal of all academic programs (Gindis, 1999). Additionally, Vygotsky believed that disability is only viewed as abnormal in the social context (Gindis, 1999). Vygotsky (1997) expressed the need for educators to change the negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, Vygotsky suggests that inclusion should be based on the idea of positive differentiation, which is viewing the strengths of individuals with a disability as opposed to emphasizing their weaknesses (Vygotsky, 1997).

Vygotsky's work indicates that learning comes prior to development and that opportunities to practice and learn from more peers are significant (Jamero, 2019). Through collaborative peer experiences, children are provided opportunities to interact, observe, and try new skills (Jamero, 2019). Social constructivism suggests a type of learning at the school level where students are fully involved, find the process meaningful, and significantly connect concepts to the actual world (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Only in this way will students be able to contribute to creating their knowledge and develop the learning habits necessary to become lifelong learners (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). The learning experience is holistic: in addition to the social aspect, emotional, aesthetic, bodily, and other forms of expression are involved. Similarly, Maslow also believed that children's education should be addressed holistically.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow presented the five types of needs by humans: physical needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). The physical needs are those which we need to survive (Maslow, 1943). Safety is freedom from external threats (McLeod, 2007). Love involves a caring relationship with others, a sense of self-belonging, respect, power, and status (Maslow, 1943). Self-actualization are those who are self-fulfilled and realize their potential (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy he created is organized in priority order, meaning lower-level needs must be met mainly before seeking higher-level satisfaction (McLeod, 2007). According to Maslow (1943), one needs not to be

fully satisfied at one level to move to the next. Motivation was said to rise from the deprivation of need, not satisfaction. The first three levels are known as deficiency needs. The following two levels are called growth needs (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to educational settings. McLeod (2007) shares that Maslow adopted a holistic approach to education and learning by looking at an individual's complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities and how these may impact learning. A great example is that their basic physiological needs must be fulfilled before a child can have their cognitive needs met. Students must also feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted in their classroom to demonstrate their most significant potential. Additionally, students must feel valued and respected in a supportive environment by all stakeholders.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can also be generalized to the needs of the school staff.

All individuals thrive on physical, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization needs (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Humans are often motivated by goals to meet their needs (Essentials Board, 2012). For an inclusive environment to be successful, all needs must be met for students and adults. In the same way that a student wants to feel needed, loved, and nurtured, a staff member may want to feel the same. Students often seek gratification from teachers, and teachers may seek the same from leadership. Bolman and Deal's

Organizational Frames to support an inclusive environment will be discussed.

Bolman & Deal's Organizational Frames

Bolman & Deal (1997) outline four orientations when supporting change at the organizational level drawn from research and practice. The four frames include structural, political, human resources, and symbolic (Essentials Board, 2012). The Structural Frame identifies the structural aspect of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The Human Resource Frame considers people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment essential to a successful organization (Bolman & Deal, 1997). This frame focuses on identifying people's talents and energy rather than putting them into assigned roles (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The Human Resource Frame identifies five human needs that successful organizations meet: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The Political Frame primarily focuses on what it views as the reality of conflict and power in organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1997). The Symbolic Frame is determined to analyze and project fundamental issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful through the organization's culture of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that define members who they are (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Each of the four frames can co-exist in an organization, but one tends to be more prevalent (Bolman & Deal, 1997). For inclusive education, the focus tends to be on the Human Resource Frame. Knowing this information would help reframe their organizations to learn the skills and reorganize structure to allow for equal

representation of all four frames (Essentials Board, 2012).

Assumptions

One assumption was that participants were honest in their responses. It is possible that individuals responded with answers they felt would make their district or school site appear inclusive. There was also an assumption that all individuals were familiar with inclusive education. Lastly, leaders or administrators could be cautious in their responses.

Delimitations

This study collects data through educator responses currently employed in public schools in Southern California. The study was limited to only the public school districts and did not include charter or private schools. It would be beneficial for future research to obtain data to be generalizable to a vast population of schools participating in inclusive education. This convenient and relatively small sample of educators limits generalizability and the possibility of powerful application to all schools thinking about inclusive education. Kelly (2004) shared that researcher bias is inevitable. Researcher bias may present itself in this study, with a lack of control of personal beliefs that may influence the study.

Definitions

Special Education: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act defines special education as instruction explicitly designed to respond to the learning needs of an individual with disabilities regardless of the environment, whether in

a classroom, home, or hospital (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Francisco et al. (2020) describes special education as being a place where not only students with disabilities are educated but a place where there are diverse learners. Special education is a variety of teaching practices that are designed for the individual needs of students with disabilities and that are carried out by trained teachers.

Inclusion: The National Center in Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) defined inclusion as providing equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services to all students, including those with severe disabilities. This education must be provided with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighboring school to better prepare all students for productive lives as full members of the society (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995.)

Inclusive Education: Educating all students in the same room and supporting them to reach their full potential to lead productive lives. (Somma & Bennett, 2020; Hayes & Bulat, 2017).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The eligibility determination process is often called the continuum of placements. These range from total segregation to complete integration (Choi et al., 2020).

Individualized Education Program: IDEA (2004) defines an IEP as a written document that is individualized for each student with a disability that is

developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting that includes the student's current levels, goals, accommodations, and modifications.

Co-Teaching: Combines a special education teacher and a general education teacher who provides instruction to diverse students with different learning needs and accommodations (Friend et al., 2010).

Summary

Throughout the history of education, specifically special education, society has realized that the segregation or isolation of individuals was inhumane (Antosh & Imparato, 2017). There is a need to reduce implicit biases, low expectations, and restrictions for those students with special needs and expand their opportunities to improve their education journeys (Giangreco, 2020). All individuals should not only be educated within the general education classroom but should have access to appropriate grade-level curricula and materials (Francisco et al., 2020; Hines, 2001). Schools and administrators should be held accountable for the performance of all students regardless of their unique needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The perspective of schools needs to be reformed to be child-centered to address the whole child and all their needs (Francisco et al., 2020; Hines, 2001). With the shift from a segregated lens to an inclusive lens, it is more important than ever to examine the context for inclusive practices in schools and the role of leadership in nurturing and sustaining inclusive contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of practice in this study is that the literature lacks agreement on a specific definition of what inclusive education is, which are the best strategies or practices, and which leadership skills are most supportive (Reindal, 2016).

This literature review aims to discover which strategies and factors are perceived to be the most imperative in inclusive education. Specifically identifying what stakeholders participating in the study identified as the best practices concerning inclusive education. In the initial search for inclusive education, through the California State University, San Bernardino's database, over 100,000 results were presented. To narrow down the focus, the researcher analyzed the historical context of special education. Through this analysis, pivotal court cases and legal implications were identified. Inclusive education was defined, the benefits were discussed, and counterarguments were addressed. In addition, looking at different inclusive frameworks that support inclusive education was also crucial to this study. Finally, an analysis of perceptions about inclusive education, preparation for inclusive education, and leadership practices related to inclusive education is presented to create a more sustainable education for all students.

Practitioners at all levels, such as district personnel, school leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals, educational staff, families, and community

members, would benefit from the findings of this research. It could be used to strengthen inclusive education. The findings could also address the start of conversations to reflect and improve as educators, administrators, and school leaders and enhance preparation programs. Additionally, findings could impact the revision and establishment of related policies.

Historical Context

Understanding the history of special education will allow for understanding the current involvement of inclusion. Special education was created to assist individuals with disabilities in achieving their full potential. This has been a long and tireless journey for all the parents, advocates, and individuals who fought to make necessary changes. Federal laws and mandates were not created for special education until 1975 however, various influential court cases brought awareness (Western Governors University, 2020).

Influential Court Cases

According to Western Governors University (2020) and Esteves and Rao (2008), the first robust and influential case involving student equality rights was in 1954. Brown v. Board of Education ruled that segregation violated equal educational opportunity through unequal learning opportunities (Villa & Thousand, 2016). Although it was not wholly related to special education, it raised awareness that all individuals, regardless of race, gender, or disability, should have equal opportunities in public education (Villa & Thousand, 2016). After the Brown v. Board of Education court case, funding for special education

programs increased; however, schools still had the right to choose to participate in special education or not (Esteves & Rao, 2008). This court case also paved the way for parents to file lawsuits to protect their children from inequitable situations (Western Governors University, 2020).

The Public Interest Law Center shared that up until 1971, Pennsylvania state law allowed public schools to deny services to any child with inadequate mental age (IDEA, 2023). This brought forth Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which would overturn that Pennsylvania law (IDEA, 2023). The ruling guaranteed quality education for all students through free public education (IDEA, 2023).

In the District of Columbia, seven students with disabilities were denied services and/or excluded due to their disabilities (Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 1972). Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia in 1972 ruled in favor of the students, ruling that students with disabilities are entitled to an education and any accommodations are to be provided regardless of the additional cost to the school. This court case was the first to address the systemic denial of students with disabilities in the public education system (Ross, 2022).

Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley (1982) made headlines when it became the first special education case to be presented in the U.S. Supreme Court. It ruled that students who qualify for special education services should have accessible public school programs which

meet the individual needs that will allow them access to instruction (Western

Governors University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008).

<u>Legal Implications</u>

The enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

allotted schools to receive federal funding, and in 1966, an amendment allowed

for funds specifically for students with disabilities (Western Governors University,

2020). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 halted students with disabilities from being

denied benefits from a federally funded program. In 1975, the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act was signed because students with disabilities were

not being educated appropriately based on their needs or were being excluded

from public school (Western Governors University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008).

What was formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children

Act would be changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in

1990 (Esteves & Rao, 2008). IDEA was enacted to make education in public

schools a right for individuals with disabilities. Students with disabilities would

have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), have free and appropriate

education (FAPE), and be serviced in the least restrictive environment (Esteves

& Rao, 2008). In 1997, IDEA placed emphasis on ensuring students with

disabilities had access to the general education curriculum (Obiakor et al., 2012).

Finally, in 2004, Congress added that students with disabilities were to be

educated by trained professionals using evidence-based practices through their

IEPs (Western Governors University, 2020). The goal of IDEA (2004) was to

provide access to the general education classroom and curriculum with appropriate accommodations and support as outlined in the IEP for students with disabilities (Western Governors University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008; IDEA, 2004).

The growth in special education continues to follow an upward trend (Francisco et al., 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008). As public education continues to provide a more inclusive environment for students with and without disabilities, special education should continue to focus on individualization (Francisco et al., 2020). By reviewing where special education started and how far it has come, in this study, the researcher hopes to promote further development. Not only is there a need for further advancement, but we also want to remember that public education is not a privilege but a right accessible to all.

Least Restrictive Environment

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a component of the eligibility determination process that is often referred to as the continuum of placements (Choi et al., 2020). The LRE ranges from total segregation, where students with special needs receive their education outside of the general education classroom (special day classes), to full integration, receiving instruction solely in a general education classroom, depending on the student's needs (Choi et al., 2020; Alexander & Byrd, 2020). The U.S. Department of Justice (2002) provided a clear direction that IDEA does not mean that students with disabilities must perform at or near grade level to be placed in a general education classroom. IDEA

encourages educators to consider the support needed for students in the general

education classroom before deciding on a more restrictive placement (Obiakor et

al., 2012). Giangreco (2020) reflected on what the researcher has learned

through years of studying students with disabilities, families, and educators trying

to address why students with severe disabilities are not being placed in general

education classrooms. Often, there are justifications for segregation based on the

LRE provisions that focus on student deficits and needs that argue against

placement in the general education classroom (Obiakor et al., 2012). There are

too many students labeled and then placed in programs that are specifically

designed for that type of disability (Giangreco, 2020). For example, students with

autism will end up in the autism program in their district. Once they are placed in

this program, getting them out of it is hard. Giangreco (2020) found there is a

need for more types of reforms, a change in leadership, and a shift in priorities

that would allow for inclusion to not exclude students with disabilities in the

reform efforts.

Inclusive Education

Due to the reauthorization of IDEA, school districts were urged to provide

more inclusive services to students with disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020).

Before this reauthorization, students with disabilities were solely seen as the

responsibility of special educators (Cobb, 2015). However, with these changes,

all stakeholders assumed student responsibility (Francisco et al., 2020; Obiakor

et. al., 2012). Inclusive education allows all children to have an equitable chance

to go to school to learn and develop skills (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). This means having all students in the same classroom, allowing access to real, meaningful opportunities for those traditionally excluded (Webster, 2014). In inclusive education, there is value for all student contributions, and allows other diverse groups of students to grow together (Somma & Bennett, 2020). With the practice of inclusion comes diversity in and outside the classroom (Somma & Bennett, 2020). Inclusion welcomes all students with special needs (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Webster, 2014). Having access to the general education classroom is not the same as inclusion or inclusive practices (Obiakor et al., 2012). Students should feel a sense of belonging in the general education classroom instead of just a visitor (Webster, 2014).

Inclusive practices benefit students with disabilities and those without (Esteves & Rao, 2008). Students with disabilities who are placed in a separate classroom are not constantly receiving both quality instruction and interactions with their general education peers (Webster, 2014). Creating positive social relationships and interactions is essential when students share academic experiences with their peers (Giangreco, 2020). Students are fully included when they are allowed to learn, discuss, contribute, and access the curriculum in a general education setting (Somma & Bennett, 2020). In the inclusive classroom, there are opportunities to assess the student's abilities in the academic and social areas to adjust their pedagogy (Somma & Bennett, 2020).

In an earlier study by Cosier et al. (2013), the researchers examined the relationship between access to general education and achievement. This Pre Elementary Longitudinal Study collected data on approximately 3,100 children, including a cross-section of 1,300 children ages six and up with a disability. The study found that there was a positive relationship between reading and mathematics achievement and increased access to general education contexts. It was shared that students with disabilities did achieve higher reading and math scores after receiving more time in the general education setting. This study supports the previous study showing the improvement in academic achievements when students are placed in the general education classroom.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Somma and Bennett (2020) conducted a study involving ten special education teachers who had previously taught in a self-contained class but recently transitioned to an inclusion classroom. Through this study came the Inclusive Educator's Continuum of Change. This continuum represents the motions that educators go through while developing inclusive classrooms. It is a representation of experiences where educators decided to embrace inclusive pedagogy. The table below represents the different developmental stages that educators progressed through until they reached their goal of a fully inclusive classroom.

Figure 1

Five Stages When Developing Inclusive Pedagogy

Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change

STAGE 5
I can't 'un-see' it
I see barriers to inclusion everywhere I go
There is no other way but inclusion
I am talking about inclusion to others outside of my school

I can't un-see it

STAGE 4
My classroom is an Inclusive place
All students Belong in my class
All my students understand what inclusion means and looks like in our class and school
Students with exceptionalities have social capital in my class and school

My whole class is inclusion

STAGE 3
I am an inclusive educator
I am using differentiated instruction to effectively include students in my class
I am collaborating with other teachers about inclusive practices
I am figuring out how to include students in my class (by reading, workshops, trying things out)

I create inclusion

STAGE 2
Inclusion is a Human Right
Students with exceptionalities have a right to be in my class
It is my job to include all students in my class
I must try

Inclusion as a theory

STAGE 1
Inclusion is Good- Charity model
Inclusion is happening
I want to include students with exceptionalities in my class
I think I will try

Inclusion is embedded practice

Note. Somma, M., & Bennett, S. (2020). Inclusive education and pedagogical change: experiences from the front lines. *International Journal of Educational*

Co-teaching

Co-teaching allows both teachers to address IEP goals, behavior plans, curriculum, or any other learning needs within the students (Ricci et al., 2019; Miller & Oh, 2013). Co-teaching is an effective teaching method in inclusive classrooms because students benefit from a knowledgeable general education teacher and a specialized special education teacher (Ricci et al., 2019). As presented by Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008), teachers need to be part of the decision-making process to create a successful co-teaching partnership. Although both teachers will have their own strategies and beliefs, they must make decisions with student and classroom success as the primary goal (Ricci et al., 2019). The newly diverse classroom will have students of different learning

levels, behaviors, and cultures. Teachers who respect one another's strategies and beliefs will work together to build off each other's strengths and weaknesses to provide a robust classroom environment (Ricci et al., 2019). Co-teaching is challenging, exhausting, and demanding but the most rewarding for student progress (Rytivaara, 2012).

Gladstone-Brown (2018) found that in co-teaching, teacher candidates get to embrace the teachings of two experienced teachers planning together and executing those plans through diverse styles and strengths. This would benefit teacher candidates because they get twice the support, resources, and feedback (Gladstone-Brown, 2018). Co-teaching demands consistent communication and a working partnership with different teachers and administrators (Brendle et al., 2017). The co-teachers should share a common philosophy and attitude toward instructional practices (Ricci et al., 2019). This would allow the presence of co-teaching by modeling how to build relationships, responsibilities, roles, pedagogy, and working collaboration (Ricci et al., 2019). In addition, Brendle et al. (2017) found that effective co-teachers are eager to share the responsibilities within the classroom and instructional. Successful co-teaching partnerships understand and implement research-based co-teaching models, requiring intensive and ongoing training (Brendle et al., 2017).

The roles and responsibilities of the general education and special education teachers in the inclusive classroom differ. Brendle et al. (2017) stated that special education teachers are the ones to provide accommodations and

modifications in the classroom for all students required by their IEP. All teachers should be responsible for administering assessments to any student, (Brendle et al., 2017). General education teachers can learn differentiated strategies that would benefit students in specific content areas (Brendle et al., 2017). On the other hand, special education teachers learn grade-level content from the time spent lesson planning with general education teachers (Brendle et al., 2017). The study conducted by Brendle et al. (2017) shared that the special education teachers felt that their role was to assist the special education students. They would like to be more involved with the co-instruction of the lesson before re-teaching or remediation. All teachers in the study reported that the general education teacher is the lead teacher and the special education teacher is the support.

<u>Benefits of Inclusive Education</u>

Inclusive education provides various benefits for all students, including academic and social benefits for students with disabilities, higher achievement in language and mathematics, higher high school graduation rates, and more positive relationships (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Hehir et al., 2016; Webster, 2014)

According to a study conducted by Brinker and Thorpe (1984), students with special needs who were in a classroom with typical peers showed academic and social improvements. This could mean improvement in communication, behavior, academia, and social skills (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984. In an inclusive classroom, the typical performing students could act as "model students" to

display appropriate school behavior (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984). Additionally, the opportunities for peer teaching/learning are endless. Having peer interactions will benefit students with special needs and develop compassion and leadership in their peers (Frostad & Pijl, 2007; Brinker & Thorpe, 1984).

In a study investigated by Hunt, Staub, Alwell, and Goetz (1994), results displayed that students with disabilities improved their communication skills by observing their peers without disabilities. Students with severe disabilities were afforded the opportunity to observe prompts, cues, and consequences in the classroom (Hunt et al., 1994). These communication skills were generalized to use with all students' developmental levels (Hunt et al., 1994).

Schoger (2006) found that opportunities for inclusive practices were not always an option due to staffing, logistics, scheduling, and being able to accommodate students' needs in the general education classroom. Alternatively, the study implemented the Reverse Inclusion Program to ensure that students with disabilities could still benefit from inclusion. The study focused on how to provide positive social interactions for students with disabilities that would replicate what it would be like in the general education classroom. After reviewing the program, the three participants with disabilities demonstrated incredible improvement with appropriate social interactions. These skills were not only demonstrated in the program but were also generalized with other peers as well. Not only were there great results with the students with disabilities, but the students in the general education classroom also reported that they learned they

could be friends and have friends with students regardless of their looks or

behaviors. These students also looked for the students with disabilities in the

program to play with on the playground or acknowledge them in the hallways.

Parental involvement

As noted in the historical journey of inclusion, parents have been

instrumental in enacting legislation and mandates (Savich, 2008). The role that

parents play in the inclusive classroom is essential. Parents should understand

the importance of an inclusive classroom (Webster, 2014). Parental involvement

could ensure that these legislations and mandates are being properly

implemented to support their children best (Esteves & Rao, 2008). When parents

are educated about inclusion, the benefits and how they relate to their children

will be apparent (Webster, 2014). Parents should be allowed to see the process

of inclusive classrooms happen firsthand, to witness their child's educational

journey (Obiakor et al., 2012). Inclusive education is a collaborative and team

effort where parents are vital (Idol, 2006). Therefore, to gain acceptance of

inclusion, teachers should ensure open communication and collaborative

meetings with parents (Webster, 2014; Obiakor et al., 2012).

Counterarguments to Inclusive Education

In the research, many arguments exist for inclusive education. In addition,

studies have brought awareness to the benefits of inclusive practices. However,

inclusive education may not always benefit everyone (Webster, 2014). Savich

(2008) discusses why inclusive education may not benefit all children. In the

inclusive classroom, all students must take the same standardized assessments (Savich, 2008). Students with IEPs will still have access to any accommodations or modifications per their IEP. However, there is concern that these assessments may not accurately represent their abilities (Savich, 2008). If students with disabilities do perform poorly on these assessments, there is concern that these scores will negatively impact the school districts (Savich, 2008). Critics of inclusive education have shared concerns that the general education class would not be as beneficial as what they would have received in the special education classroom (Savich, 2008). Additionally, there is concern that the funds would not be able to support an inclusive setting (Cooper et al., 2008). In order for inclusive education to be successful, districts should have access to appropriate funds to promote inclusive viability (Cooper et al., 2008). Inclusive classrooms should have fewer students to ensure all students have access to individualized attention (Savich, 2008). Lastly, general and special education teachers do not have proper training, collaboration time, and support to ensure inclusivity (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

<center>Inclusive Framework</center>

Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defined a framework as "a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs used to plan or decide something." A school that supports a fully integrated educational framework is better positioned to meet the needs of all students, including those in poverty, experiencing high mobility, who would benefit from an accelerated curriculum, or who learn differently (Choi et al.,

<center>29</center>

2020). This study will discuss frameworks that promote inclusive education for not only students with disabilities but all students.

<u>Response to Intervention Framework</u>

IDEA (2004) calls for analyzing different strategies to address the unique needs of all students. Students with varied prior knowledge, skills, and learning styles enter the classroom. One effective strategy is Response to Intervention (RTI), which provides direct instruction and interventions, progress monitoring, and adjusting based on data (Sailor, 2009). Karten (2017) revealed that schools need a framework to identify student needs and support, collect data, and implement evidence-based strategies for intervention, which is then monitored through assessment. The RTI process consists of three tiers, which are available to efficiently differentiate instruction for all students (Sailor, 2009).

Tier 1 comprises high-quality classroom instruction, screening, and group interventions (Sailor, 2009). Tier 1 provides general instruction with embedded universal support received by all students (Buffum et al., 2010). Through this tier, students identified as being "at risk" through the universal screenings will have access to supplemental instruction in the regular classroom (Sailor, 2009). Students identified as "at risk" are progress monitored for a period of time using a validated screening system. Once the monitoring period is over, students showing significant progress are returned to their regular classroom instruction, and those not showing adequate progress are moved to Tier 2 (Sailor, 2009).

Tier 2 provides supplemental instruction during small groups, when necessary, through targeted interventions (Buffum et al. 2010). Students who must make adequate progress in Tier 1 receive intensive instruction matched to their individual needs (Sailor, 2009). These targeted services and interventions are generally provided in small-group settings with instruction in the general curriculum (Sailor, 2009). Students who continue progressing at a slower rate are considered for more intensive interventions as part of Tier 3 (Buffum et al. 2010).

Tier 3 provides the most intensive instructions for students needing additional support and practice education (Buffum et al. 2010). At the tier 3 level, students receive individualized and intense interventions addressing the students' skill deficits (Sailor, 2009). In this tier, students who are not reaching adequate progress with the interventions are then referred for a comprehensive evaluation and considered for eligibility for special education services (Sailor, 2009).

Figure 2

RTI Tier Model
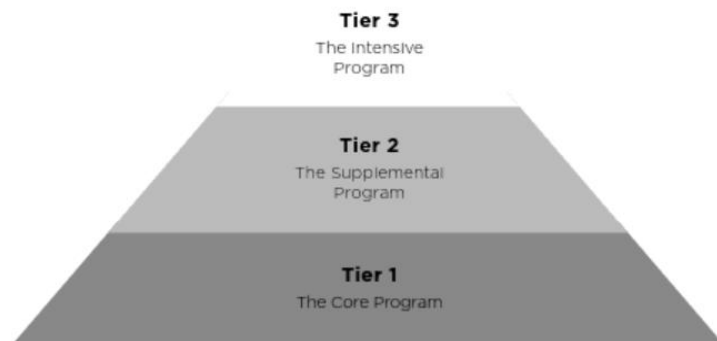
Note. Buffum, A., Mattos, M., & Weber, C. (2010). The Why Behind RTI. *Educational Leadership, 68*, 10-16.

Through RTI, school sites have the ability to recognize the diverse needs that require differentiation to ensure access to a proper education (Sailor, 2009). RTI is beneficial in the school setting because it allows students to receive appropriate interventions before being assessed for special education services (Sailor, 2009).

<u>Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Framework</u>

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are utilized to improve students' academic and social outcomes (Horner & Sugai, 2015). PBIS is a positive approach to student behavior in which we teach expected behaviors for each specific school setting (Horner & Sugai, 2015). PBIS aims to increase student academic performance and safety, decrease problem behavior, and establish a positive school climate (Musti-Rao & Haydon, 2011). PBIS delivers whole-school social culture and additional tiers of behavior support intensity needed to improve educational and social outcomes for all students (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Figure 3

Muti-tiered Prevention Model

Tier I: Primary Prevention

Tier I plus Tier II: Secondary Prevention

Tier I plus Tier II plus Tier III: Tertiary Prevention
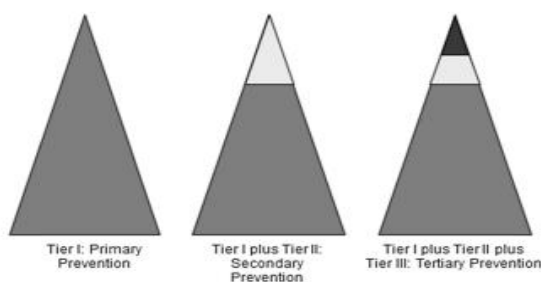
Note. Horner, R. H., & Sugai, G. (2015). School-wide PBIS: An Example of Applied Behavior Analysis Implemented at a Scale of Social Importance. *Behavior analysis in practice*, *8*(1), 80–85.

The Multi-tiered prevention model above shows the referenced multi-tiered prevention approach. Tier I, which is often referenced as primary prevention, is where all students receive this support (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Tier I is designed to be a proactive approach, all clearly defined. Positive behavioral expectations are taught from the start with the hope of reducing problem behaviors (Horner & Sugai, 2015). About 80-85% of students may benefit from additional structured support (Horner & Sugai, 2015). This is where Tier II is then implemented and added to Tier I support (Horner & Sugai, 2015). Tier II focuses on moderate-intensity supports that address the most common needs of students with ongoing problem behavior (Horner & Sugai, 2015). If additional support is still needed, Tier III practices are added to Tier I and Tier II support (Musti-Rao & Haydon, 2011). Tier III support can be characterized by individualized assessment, individualized support plan design, comprehensive support plan implementation, and the management of support by a team uniquely organized to meet the preferences and needs of the individual student (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) leverages the principles of RTI and PBIS. It integrates a continuum of systemwide resources, strategies, structures, and practices (Rinaldi, 2013). Integrating both models directly address

children's academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development from early childhood through adolescence (California Department of Education, 2022). MTSS depends on gathering data through universal screening, data-driven decision-making, and problem-solving teams and focuses on content standards (Rinaldi, 2013). MTSS aligns the entire system of initiatives, supports, and resources and implements continuous improvement processes throughout the system (California Department of Education, 2022).

Implementing MTSS provides the opportunity to promote more inclusion through a tiered framework for instruction (Rinaldi, 2013). This shows the possibility of supporting students with various needs in the general education classroom (Rinaldi, 2013). MTSS is effective with a three-tier service delivery model where every student receives high-quality, research-based instruction, behavior, and emotional support (Rinaldi, 2013). Implementing MTSS requires a shift in the current reality of the school setting (Rinaldi, 2013). The figure below illustrates the comprehensive design of MTSS. This includes the whole child, academic, behavioral, social-emotional, family community engagement, administrative leadership, integrated education framework, and inclusive policy and practice. This visual represents the systemic change needed to implement inclusive education successfully.

Figure 4

Multi-tiered System of Support
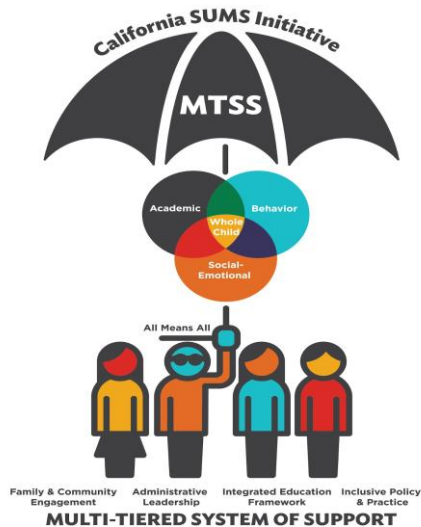
Note. LEA Self-Assessment: CA MTSS Foundational Training for LEA Leadership Teams. (n.d.).

Before schools implement MTSS, district implementation teams need to analyze their system to ensure that it can support schools in the implementation of MTSS and determine its sustainability (Choi et al., 2020). District teams must assess themselves using the District Capacity Assessment (DCA) (Ward et al., 2015). The DCA provides the basis required for a sustainable support system (Ward et al., 2015). The district implementation team and other invited individuals review and score the features (Ward et al., 2015). Following the DCA is the LEA Self-Assessment. This assessment was designed so districts can assess their own MTSS implementation efforts and reflect upon areas for capacity building

and systemic collaboration while building a culture of reflective inquiry (Ward et al., 2015). District Leadership Teams must examine their own systemic practices, demonstrated through research, to be the components of an effective LEA/District system (Ward et al., 2015). It supports the continuous improvement cycle of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) as well as assesses an LEA/District's capacity for building and sustaining a multi-tiered system of support (SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment, 2016)

Participating schools in the MTSS implementation, get evaluated using the SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment (SWIFT-FIA) (Swift Schools, 2022). This self-assessment is used by trained school leadership teams with the support of facilitators to evaluate the current implementation status (Swift Schools, 2022). The assessment is designed to ensure schoolwide practices are in place for the success of all students (SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment, 2016). The assessed domains include administrative leadership, multi-tiered support systems, family and community engagement, integrated education framework, and inclusive policy and practice (Swift Schools, 2022). This process is conducted through structured conversations that review the evidence and lead to a rating. This would allow schools to monitor progress over time to determine the next steps through data analysis (SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment, 2016). The data determines an action plan focusing on specific features or domains (SWIFT Fidelity Integrity Assessment, 2016).

Choi et al. (2020) conducted a study investigating the efficacy of MTSS, an equity-based framework, on academic achievement for students with IEPs. The longitudinal study included 61 schools participating in a four-year MTSS implementation plan. Student data were analyzed during the last two years of the implementation to determine growth in ELA and math assessments. The results determined there was growth in both ELA and math, a 1.1% increase in proficiency for ELA, and a 1.4% growth in proficiency for math. Thus, showing the positive impact that MTSS has on student achievement outcomes (Choi et al., 2020).

<div align="center">Perceptions on Inclusive Education</div>

Maund (2003) defines perception as the process by which we acquire an understanding or interpretation of something. Different challenges may present with perception (Goethals & Reckman, 1973). This may occur because different individuals are trying to make sense of circumstances that may appear differently to others (Goethals & Reckman, 1973). Perceptions are heavily relied on when individuals acquire knowledge about the environment or world (Goethals & Reckman, 1973). It is natural to form perceptions about people or situations when minimal information is known, some of which might be based on stereotypes (Goethals & Reckman, 1973).

Perceptions often influence the school culture and can play a factor in implementing inclusive education (Valle-Flórez et al., 2022). Similarly, Salend (2001) and Smith (2000) state that to educate a child with particular needs, an

educator's attitude, language, and beliefs will influence success. According to Salend (2001), the actions and beliefs of the teacher set the stage for successful inclusive practices.

Teacher Perception of Inclusive Education

Teachers often creates opinions or perceptions about others based on interactions of background knowledge (Valle-Flórez et al., 2022). These perceptions may influence how a person views or continues interacting with them (Valle-Flórez et al., 2022). Perceptions are powerful because stereotypes or misconceptions sometimes influence them but can cause considerable impacts in the workplace (Valle-Flórez et al., 2022).

Woodcock and Woolfson (2019) sought to explore 120 teacher perceptions about systemic support, specialist resources, managing class learning, and attitudes. In the area of systemic support, teachers expressed both positive and negative comments. Some teachers felt there was a lack of support and proactive planning from the administrative side. Additionally, teachers expressed too many expectations placed on them, and professional development is not beneficial. Some teachers were unsure about inclusive education at their schools. Specialist resources were an area where there were also mixed perceptions. Some commented that the special education department was supportive, while others said teachers are "...left alone to fend for themselves…" Thirty teachers expressed concern about managing class learning. They shared that addressing student diversity with larger class sizes was challenging. There

were concerns about addressing academic, social, and behavioral needs and feeling overwhelmed. Twenty-two teachers felt that there was not enough planning time and individualized/scaffolded instruction. Attitudes toward inclusion were an area that provided additional negative comments. Teachers felt that not all staff members embraced inclusion and that it was difficult to promote change when some members were resistant. It was shared that not all staff willingly participated in the IEP process. The researchers found that teachers did not focus on their attitudes; rather, the attitudes of other teachers seemed more critical. Along with staff members' attitudes being resistant, teachers also said parents and students were sometimes resistant. The researchers recommend that for inclusion to be successful, there needs to be more systemic support, such as school climate and collaboration (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019).

Idol (2006) found that attitudes toward inclusive education ranged from staff being willing to accept and try inclusive practices to being completely on board for inclusion. In addition, attitudes toward students with disabilities were positive and showed that most educators across schools were supportive of these students. However, for inclusive education to be successful, teachers need supportive measures to help empower themselves and their students (Emerson et al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

Teacher Perceptions of Self

There is undoubtedly a need for more inclusive teaching. However, preservice teachers are concerned about the lack of knowledge or experience in

working with students with disabilities (Emerson et al., 2018). Forlin & Chambers (2011) evaluated pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding their preparedness for inclusion. Sixty-seven teachers determined a strong link between their perceived levels of confidence and knowledge and their attitudes and concerns about inclusion. The pre-service teachers demonstrated that their level of confidence in teaching and their knowledge about the legislation was significantly and positively related to attitudes towards including students with disabilities and negatively related to concerns about inclusive education. The study showed that the greater their knowledge base, the more positive they were towards inclusion and the less concerned they were about it. Due to the results of this study, it would be unethical to suggest, let alone require, inclusive teaching to teachers without providing the knowledge and skills to engage in this avenue of teaching.

Gregory (2018) and Leatherman (2007) found that teacher perspectives and attitudes contributed to success in the inclusive setting. Leatherman (2007) allowed teachers to reflect on their own experiences and express the success factors in their situations. The study presented that the teachers feel that the inclusive classroom is the best place for children and teachers (Leatherman, 2007). Based on the findings, it is suggested that the inclusive classroom is a very positive community for all children and adults to learn from each other. Teachers also shared how they grew as they learned about the children and are better teachers because of the inclusive experiences. Gregory (2018) administered a study that investigated how educator attitudes toward inclusion

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vary between nations that have disparate forms of special education systems. The researcher revealed, "… educators must possess a desire to use the skills and techniques that will ensure the curriculum is accessible to all children" (Gregory, 2018, p. 128). In addition, teachers' perception of their ability to teach children with special needs will determine the success of their students.

Results from the study conducted by Holmes (2018) to determine emergent themes regarding educators' beliefs and practices about inclusion showed that 97% of the participants felt comfortable collaborating with special education or general education teachers with the need for more training, support, and adaptations. Similar findings were found in the study by Leatherman (2007), which found that teachers felt the inclusive classroom was a positive and growing experience but also stated that more training was needed to feel more comfortable in their jobs.

Two co-teachers in the Brendle et al. (2017) study that examined knowledge and perception of co-teaching reported that their positive relationship benefited their collaboration, teaching, and the students by making teaching exciting and enjoyable for all those involved. All teachers involved in the study expressed that their positive professional relationships allowed them to learn from each other and grow.

Perception of School Administrators on Inclusive Education

Idol (2006) conducted a study that collected data on administrators' perceptions of inclusive education. The study included three principals and two

assistant principals. All of the administrators reported that they were on the side of inclusion. Their perception of students with disabilities was supportive. There was no consensus when the administrators were asked how they thought students with disabilities were best educated. All of the administrators agreed that inclusive education would be most effective if the extra staff was provided to support any student.

Inclusive education requires the right attitudes and perceptions of educators and administrators. In addition, support and resources would be necessary to implement effective inclusive education.

Preparing for Inclusive Education

General education teachers often express that they are not fully prepared to teach students with accommodations, modifications, behavior intervention plans, etc. There is a concern that teachers are going into inclusive education not fully prepared for this drastic change and what is necessary to prepare teachers (Stephenson et al., 2012; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). To implement inclusive practices, there needs to be training and education before the creation of inclusive classrooms. The success of inclusive practice in a productive classroom is that of the teacher's mindset (Webster, 2014). If teachers are not in the appropriate mindset, there will be an effect on how they conduct their classrooms (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). Logan & Wimer (2013) organized a study to analyze whether or not teachers felt prepared to teach in an inclusive setting. Some concerns that were expressed consisted of, not enough special education

teachers or paraprofessionals, challenges working with special education students, insufficient planning time, and limited to no refresher courses (Logan & Wimer, 2013). Similarly, Leatherman (2007) found teachers felt they needed more in-service training and education to experience more comfort in their jobs. All of these are valid concerns and should be used to create a framework that would address these concerns (Leatherman, 2007).

Research shows that although inclusive practices have made significant advancements, there is still progress that needs to be made (Holmes, 2008; Choi et al., 2020). Inclusive education has been and will be a long-debated topic of school reform for many years to come (Holmes, 2008). Although we have made developments in the progress of students with disabilities, inclusive education is here to stay. One suggestion is for inclusive programs to build avenues to provide in-service training and education to the teachers to meet the needs of children in the inclusive classroom (Holmes, 2008; Leatherman, 2007).

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) helps educators stay up to date with relevant knowledge and skills (Emerson et al., 2018). The need for supportive and useful professional development is apparent (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Due to the pressure of state and federal mandates, PD may be negatively impacted, where focusing on best practices for students with disabilities is no longer a priority in the general education classroom (Cooper et al., 2008; Alexander et al., 2020). Professional development for educators should include

historical context, terms and legislative background, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and Universal Design for Learning (Emerson et al., 2018; Murphy, 2017).

Sloik (2018) presents that there is insufficient training and education for teachers to reinforce inclusive practices. Teachers have expressed a lack of education when dealing with students with exceptional needs as well as behavioral needs of students in the current situation (Cooper et al., 2008). In the study conducted by Alexander and Byrd (2020), the researchers desired to determine and describe what aspects of teaching special education educators feel that general education teachers need to work successfully with students with special needs in the inclusive classroom. The hope of this study was to influence professional development and training. Through a qualitative method study, eighty-three special education teachers were interviewed in a semi-structured environment where they were encouraged to elaborate. From this study emerged three themes that special educators felt would assist general educators: core knowledge, key dispositions, and essential skills. These potential topics align with ensuring teachers are going into the inclusive classroom feeling prepared. Additionally, collaborative professional development activities should occur with all disciplines to allow or increase opportunities to share knowledge and skills with everyone.

Collaboration

        Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) defined "effective collaboration" as a collaboration that is strong, of high quality, deliberative, and meaningful. The researchers conducted an explanatory study that examined teacher views on collaboration in two elementary schools. The participants were asked questions based on the collaborative activities they participated in. Teachers found that the collaborative activities presented were beneficial and worthwhile. The results showed that teachers were not regularly participating in collaborative activities. It was also found that teachers expressed the need to know how to collaborate. Teachers in the study wanted collaborative activities to focus on improved teaching, planning within grade level, and the academic growth of students. Lastly, active collaboration, paired with appropriate professional development for all teachers that supports the inclusion of all diverse learners, is highly valued (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Emerson et al., 2018).

Planning Time

        School administrators should be required to provide adequate time for teachers to collaborate (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Planning time should be utilized to analyze teaching efforts and their complexity. Through shared observations, there is the ability to share open and constructive criticism (Gladstone-Brown, 2018). Along the same lines, Brendle et al. (2017) examined information from teachers in reading and math co-taught classrooms to document the method of implementation and to gain insight into participants'

knowledge and perceptions of co-teaching. The participants shared that although

administrative support was present, there is still a need for more adequate

planning time and more training in best practices (Brendle et al., 2017). All

teachers suggested that lesson planning should be a collaborative effort where

input from general and special education was considered (Brendle et al., 2017).

Communication

Communication with various stakeholders is essential for effective

teaching and collaboration in inclusive settings. Communication is the key to

determining roles and responsibilities within the inclusive classroom. There is a

desire for more productive dialogue to improve the issues between general

education teachers and special educators. Learning the best and more effective

methods to serve the needs of all students is through effective communication

between all stakeholders, including administrators (Alexander & Byrd, 2020).

Likewise, Brendle et al. (2017) found that teachers expressed the importance of

communication and collaboration and how it is crucial in the inclusive classroom.

Resources

Without proper resources, an inclusive classroom is not possible. Cooper

et al. (2008) shared that there is a lack of resources, such as training on assistive

technology tools and instruction, that would best support students with

disabilities. Having appropriate resources is pivotal to improving faculty skills and

knowledge in terms of effective teaching for students with disabilities (Cooper et

al., 2008).

<u>Administrative Support</u>

Administrative support is key to the successful implementation of inclusion. School administrators are able to communicate positively the importance of inclusive education (Sloik, 2018). Brendle et al., (2017) examined information from teachers in reading and math co-taught classrooms to document the method of implementation and to gain insight into participants' knowledge and perceptions of co-teaching. The participants shared that although administrative support was present, there is still a need for adequate planning time and more training in best practices.

Woodcock and Woolfson (2019) found that in the area of systematic support, teachers had mixed feelings about whether they were receiving quality administrative support. Some teachers provided positive responses, such as how helpful the board and administration were throughout the inclusion process, while others felt there was a lack of support. Comparatively, Leatherman (2007) also documented that teachers needed more interactions with administrators. The participants also suggest the need for administrators' support in the classroom. With this being said, administrators must find alternative ways to support inclusion in their schools, including being present in the classroom to determine assets and needs.

<div align="center">Inclusive Environment</div>

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) identified four key components that support an inclusive environment. The first component is a supportive

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environment that fosters strong relationships and community. The second component is productive instructional strategies that support and motivate student learning. Thirdly, Social and Emotional Learning will foster skills, habits, and growth mindsets. Lastly, a system of support that enables healthy development and addresses student needs.

Supportive Environment

In an inclusive environment, it is important to have a caring and culturally responsive learning community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). A space where all students are seen and valued and where they can learn in physical and emotional safety (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In this safe space, there are relationships that are being built, and routines, relationships, and trust is fostered between all stakeholders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Instructional Practices

Instructional strategies are imperative to know to support the needs of any student (Emerson et al., 2018). All students are unique learners and should be taught in ways that allow them to be successful (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). There is a plethora of strategies that would be useful in any classroom but vital in an inclusive classroom (Emerson et al., 2018).

Teachers in inclusive classrooms can promote daily support by intentionally grouping students according to their reading or pacing levels, which will lead to creating a sense of belonging amongst students (Webster, 2014). Different modalities should also be offered to students in an inclusive classroom,

including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning (Webster, 2014). Novak (2016) shares that the four necessary components for students to learn are: the learner's effort, social surroundings, the opportunity to learn, and good teaching.

This is when Universal Design for Learning (UDL) would be beneficial. UDL is a process that activates learning for all students, minimizes the need for individual accommodations, and eventually engages all students. UDL is a great way to bridge what was learned in the teacher education program and what is being practiced at the school site (Emerson et al., 2018). The principles of UDL are effective strategies for helping educational leaders succeed in supporting changes to teacher practice (Lewis, 2018).

Differentiated instruction and scaffolding could be beneficial to any student with different learning needs (Leatherman, 2017). Differentiated instruction along with inclusive practices in the classroom will increase student engagement for all students (Webster, 2014). Differentiated instruction not only increases engagement in students but also allows students to learn differently regardless of the challenges they may face because no students are alike (Emerson et al., 2018; Webster, 2014). Any educator or leader would benefit from the opportunities to learn these practices (Emerson et al., 2018). Professional development provides opportunities to promote inclusive strategies and methods, such as differentiation, to support and engage students (Webster, 2014).

Somma and Bennett (2020) shared that, teachers who recognize their responsibility to adjust their teaching and implement practices of differentiated

instruction and Universal Design for Learning are essential for inclusive education to flourish.

<u>Social-Emotional Learning</u>

The "Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)" discusses how Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral part of education. CASEL identifies five main areas of social-emotional competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL consists of explicit instruction in social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). There should also be a balance of opportunities to learn and use social-emotional skills, habits, and mindsets inside and outside the classroom (CASEL, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Leadership

Marion and Gonzalez (2018) define "leadership" as one's involvement in activities that influence change in a system. However, it is oftentimes difficult to define leadership specifically. It is easily recognized when seen or experienced but not always easily definable. The reason for this is the difference in perspectives one has and their view of leadership. Leadership is also defined as the ability to influence a group to achieve a goal while implementing change (Marion and Gonzalez, 2018). With the current reality of the education system, in order to implement effective change, there is a need for innovative, open, and strong leadership (Atasoy, 2020).

Prior research and knowledge have determined that inclusive education has substantial benefits for not only students with disabilities but for all students (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Webster, 2014; Hicks-Monroe, 2011). However, as previously reviewed, inclusive education is least effective without proper support (Alexander & Byrd, 2020; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Faraclas, 2018). Effective inclusive practices require all stakeholders to participate actively and are knowledgeable in the inclusive philosophy despite the lack of inclusive training programs (Murphy, 2018). It is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that professional development and training are provided for all stakeholders regarding inclusive practices and the legislative aspects (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Faraclas, 2018). In addition, leaders are responsible for being present and involved in inclusive practices by attending meetings and ensuring financial resources are available when needed (Cooper et al., 2008). Research has revealed that with the support of all stakeholders and effective leadership, inclusive education is possible (Murphy, 2017). The ultimate goal for leaders in inclusive settings is to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with an equitable and individualized education in the least restrictive environment (Western Governors University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008; IDEA, 2004). For the purpose of this literature review, educational leaders will refer to all leaders involved in decision-making for special education purposes, which include but are not limited to principles, assistant principals, and district leaders.

Trust is a word so powerful and intense that it is earned (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trust is often correlated with glue because glue holds things together, which is what trust does in relationships and organizations (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Without trust, we start to see a lack of communication and increase tension (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Trust is not automatically given. Trust is a choice that is given based on evidence (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In education, trust means believing in your team members, providing academic freedom, and inquiry (Cherkowski, 2010). Valuable leadership will promote better teachers, which will benefit the students (Murphy, 2017). Leadership does not have power but fosters the ability to trust and allow your team to shine (Chandler, 2015).

Tschannen-Moran (2014) describes the five facets of trust as someone having benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence.

- Benevolence is seen in someone who cares and is willing to act in one's best interest
- Honesty talks about a person's character, integrity, and authenticity
- Openness is allowing yourself to be vulnerable through sharing information, influence, experiences, and control
- Reliability, dependency, and consistency are all important in building trust

- Competence is defined as the ability to perform a task as expected,
  according to the standards.

Trust can be developed through many different opportunities but the first
and most important thing is getting to know your staff (Cobb, 2015). If you don't
know your staff, you won't know what their assets and needs are (Cobb, 2015).
Another way to cultivate trust is by learning the history and background of your
school site (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Do not go in and try to make changes that
may affect a school's current symbolic traditions (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).
Lastly, make yourself available to others, build relationships, and listen
(Tschannen-Moran, 2014). All of these aspects of trust are important in the
inclusive setting. Implementing inclusive practices takes time and effort
(Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Without trust, all stakeholders will have difficulty
implementing these practices with fidelity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Effective Leadership

Leadership is the ability to guide a team or group in a positive direction
while allowing others to take the lead when necessary (Bryson, 2018).
Leadership is providing the opportunity for all stakeholders to have a voice and
be acknowledged (Bryson, 2018; Marion & Gonzales, 2014). An exceptional
leader should possess several different qualities like empathy, confidence,
enthusiasm, integrity, transparency, trustworthiness, a growth mindset, and
vulnerability (Cobb, 2015). Leadership is providing a shared vision with
confidence and the ability to accomplish the vision (Bryson, 2018). Effective

leadership is not only providing guidance but also constantly questioning and discussing current practices in place (Bryson, 2018). The questioning and dialogue will provide growth, responsibility, and purpose for the team (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Ultimately, a true leader knows how to listen to the visions and ideas of a team (Bryson, 2018; Marion & Gonzales, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Grogan, 2013).

Leaders should focus on facilitating a positive and productive school culture (Murphy, 2018; Chandler, 2015; Cobb, 2015). A school culture where *all* members feel welcomed and included (Murphy, 2018; Chandler, 2015). By allowing all stakeholders to have a voice, you will offer opportunities for individuals with different skill sets to rise to the occasion (Grogan, 2013). According to Grogan (2013), not one individual can handle every problem, therefore, arranging for others to utilize their skills; will benefit not only the leader but also the individual. A leader should "read" the school culture as well as "walk the room" (Wilson, 2020). Walking the room is just that, making yourself present and getting to know your staff members (Wilson, 2020). If a leader can get to know their staff members, how they work, or what challenges they are dealing with, they are building that community and team mentality (Bryson, 2018). In addition, being able to listen and fully comprehend the school history that may have led to the current culture of today is important (Murphy, 2018). It would not be ethical or productive if I chose to go in and try to change the culture without fully understanding the culture and its history (Wilson, 2020).

<u>The Inclusive Leader</u>

Inclusive education requires an inclusive leader (Murphy, 2017). Tapia &
Polonskaia (2020) identifies an inclusive leader as someone who is collaborative,
builds interpersonal trust, adaptive, transparent, culturally agile, embraces
diversity, creates safe spaces, and is transformative and empowering. Through
these qualities, inclusive leaders are more effective and have a greater impact on
stakeholders in their schools (Cobb, 2015).

According to Murphy (2018), as an inclusive leader, it is important to know
important definitions, concepts, and laws. This includes any pivotal court cases
and legal implications that influence inclusive education (Western Governors
University, 2020; Esteves & Rao, 2008). In addition, understanding the benefits
of inclusive education for students with disabilities and those without. Inclusive
leaders should understand their school culture and the perceptions of inclusive
education (Murphy, 2018). Knowing and being familiar with the different inclusive
practices, such as co-teaching, could be beneficial when creating inclusive
school plans (Faraclas, 2018). It is important that inclusive leaders identify the
strengths and needs of the school site to adjust current practices (Bryson, 2018).
When the school leader has a solid understanding of their school and inclusive
education, the preparation for educating students with disabilities in the inclusive
classroom is present (Cobb, 2015). Inclusive leaders are able to reflect on the
different perceptions towards inclusion, identify strengths, needs, and solutions,
collaborate with special education teachers, determine effective professional

development, create training, build professional learning communities, develop goals, and be involved (Faraclas, 2018). No matter what experience a leader may have, school leaders are one of the most influential and transformational individuals in a school (Yang, 2014).

A study conducted by Poon-McBrayer & Wong (2013) determined how the decision to participate in inclusive education, how leaders successfully implemented inclusive education, and what challenges were presented. The researchers wanted to take a deeper look at the three aspects that were identified in the whole school approach to inclusive education: (a) the basis for practicing inclusive education under a policy of voluntary participation, (b) school leaders' strategies to facilitate the whole-school approach to inclusive education, and (c) challenges school leaders to continue to encounter. A qualitative approach was taken to interview 10 principals in participating inclusive education schools. Principals reported that according to their beliefs, the quote "educate everyone, discriminate no one" was an important foundation to support the inclusive education policy. Another successful element that the principals identified was the relationship between school leaders and teachers to promote inclusive education. Through this partnership, principals should create a relationship that encompasses trust and respect. It was shared that some principals tried to chat with teachers one on one, sharing experiences. A shared vision was a significant element of an effective partnership. Principals stressed the importance of having a firm vision that acts as a guide in the school's

direction with a common goal and communicating this vision to all stakeholders. Lack of resources, inconsistent funding, and high turnover rate pose challenges for principals when trying to implement an inclusive setting. Inclusive education should be a core aspect for pre-service teachers and long-term professional development programs paid for with federal funding. For inclusive education to be effective, would require changes to our values, systems, and practices.

There is an emphasis on collaborative effort and the practice of inclusivity, where all stakeholders are responsible for all students. Overall, there needs to be systematic change and the building of values, training, and resources to ensure inclusive education. With this systematic change, comes a leader who is ready to make meaningful, transformative changes (Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2013).

Transformational Leadership

Each school differs from one another due to the different styles of school leadership (Yang, 2014). Lambrecht et al. (n.d) found there are two main aspects of leadership within inclusive education, one being collaborative processes and the other being lesson development. It is the job of school leaders to encourage and foster collaboration and lesson development to achieve more effective educational outcomes for all students (Lambrecht, n.d.). Based on the study, the leadership style that seems to best fit the need for inclusive education is the transformational leadership style. The outcome of the study showed there was a positive impact on the provision of structures in the area of collaboration when utilizing a transformational leadership style approach. Similarly, Murphy (2018)

found that transformational leadership practices have been linked to the success of inclusive education. Transformational leaders are able to communicate their vision, evaluate and overcome problems, and encourage others to promote growth. The qualities of a transformational leader include enthusiasm, passion, motivation, goal-oriented, influential, considerate, and intellectual (Marion & Gonzales, 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass, 1985).

In a meta-analysis study by Chin (2007), there was a significant and positive effect of transformational leadership on teacher job satisfaction, school outcomes, school effectiveness, and student achievement. Effective leadership includes and promotes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Burns, 1978). Closely related was a study explored by Atasoy (2020) that examined the relationship between transformational leadership and transactional leadership of school leadership and the role it played in the school culture and organizational change. The study involved 2,171 teachers in secondary schools who voluntarily participated. According to the results of the study, the transformational leadership style was found to be high, therefore reflecting on the school culture and transactional leadership resulting in high levels of organizational change.

Summary

This literature review explored the historical context of special education and the changes that led to inclusive education. Exploration was done on what inclusive education is, and the necessary components to effectively implement

inclusive practices. With the implementation of practices and frameworks, there will be a positive effect on student success. Perception was an area that was researched to provide a glimpse of how perceptions affect inclusive education. Lastly, leadership practices were investigated to determine what is needed to support inclusive education.

The researcher noted that inclusive education has the potential to benefit all learners when support, training, and resources are provided (Woodcock and Woolfson, 2019; Gregory, 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Leatherman, 2007). Inclusive education not only provides access and support to general education curriculum for students with disabilities but for students with any needs (Emerson et al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Cooper et al., 2008). An inclusive framework is necessary to create systematic change at a school site to ensure all students are holistically taken into consideration (Choi et al., 2020).

It was noted that perceptions about inclusive education and its implementation are an important factor in its success (Valle-Flórez et al., 2022). Educators who do not feel confident in their abilities to teach students with various needs will not contribute to student success (Emerson et al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). However, when educators demonstrate the willingness to learn and grow, inclusivity is embraced (Gregory 2018; Leatherman, 2007).

According to the research in the literature review leadership is an important factor in the success of inclusive education. The researcher also noted the importance of administrators' support, and involvement in the implementation

of inclusive education (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). In addition, leadership

qualities support or hinder the success of inclusive education (Marion &

Gonzales, 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative case study regarding what individuals in close relation to inclusive education believe is necessary for effective inclusive education. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of what teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents feel is vital for a successful inclusive environment and provided a way to develop a theory from the data in order to understand what aspects are most important for inclusive education. Throughout this chapter, the purpose and research design of this study will be discussed. This chapter will include the purpose statement, research questions, research design, site of the study, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to (1) determine the necessary resources or training to effectively teach in an inclusive environment, (2) investigate which instructional practices have the greatest impact on positive student outcomes (3) identify which leadership attributes have the biggest impact on inclusive education, (4) identify the common perceptions about best practices for inclusive education among teachers, admin, staff, and parents.

Individual interviews with semi-structured questions requiring descriptive responses were thought to be most beneficial for this study. Research questions

one-three focused on exploring best practices that are most effective for an

inclusive setting through the interview process. Research question four identified

the commonalities among the four groups as to what they perceive to be best

practices in inclusive environments. The findings of this study provide school

districts and their school administrators with important information on the

effective inclusive practices that support *all* students.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

The qualitative case study research design study used a semi-structured

interview protocol to investigate the perceived necessary components of an

inclusive school from twenty individuals. Qualitative research uses data analysis

to identify patterns or themes which would best suit this study (Creswell, 2012).

The qualitative data collected from this study will help identify best practices for

inclusive education.

The researcher began by administering open-ended questions that were

used to gather information, which were then grouped into codes, themes,

categories, or larger dimensions (Creswell, 2012). The study included individuals

from snowball sampling from a Southern California school district. The sampling

included teachers, school administrators, support staff, and parents in

elementary settings. Stakeholders voluntarily participated in interviews. The

interviews provided opportunities for different perspectives from a variety of

personnel to identify strategies for an effective inclusive school. By using a

qualitative case study, individuals were able to provide their perception by channeling prior knowledge and experiences (Creswell, 2015).

<center>Site of the Study & Rationale for Choice of Site</center>

This case study takes place in Southern California, within a school district that serves a divergent population of students. The researcher used the pseudonym Destined School District to represent the district. The Destined School District serves more than 21,800 students in preschool through eighth grade. This district consists of 22 elementary schools, six middle schools, four K-8 schools, and one Online Academy. This district's student population includes 89.2% Hispanic/Latino, 3.1% White, 3% Black, 2.8% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.8% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

<center>Population and Sample for the Study</center>

For this case study, the researcher implemented the use of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is purposeful sampling that occurs after a study begins and is when the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to be part of the study (Creswell, 2012). Participants in this research study include certificated teachers, administrators, support staff who work at the district, and parents whose children attend a school in the district. There are five participants from the four different groups of individuals. Individuals in this study possess different degrees based on their positions with varying amounts of time in education, as well as being diverse in demographics.

Instrumentation

An interview protocol with semi-structured questions was created by the researcher as the instrument to be used to gather stakeholder responses from the twenty participants. Interviews were conducted with participants on a one-to-one basis to provide the researcher with extensive perspectives about the research questions. Interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom. The purpose of accumulating responses from the research questions is to understand the participants' beliefs and experiences about inclusive education practices (Creswell, 2015).

There is a need for a protocol to establish a structure within an interview. The researcher recorded the interviews in order to provide a detailed record of the interview (Creswell, 2015). Along with the recording, the researcher also took notes to provide additional documentation.

Research Questions and Interview Protocols

1. In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program?
    a. Which training do you find most beneficial for an inclusive environment?
    b. What resources do you feel are necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting?
    c. Does your school site use a framework to promote inclusive education? What is it? Is it effective?

d. How much time do you feel is necessary to fully implement an inclusive classroom?

2. Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?

   a. What inclusive instructional practices are most effective on student outcomes?

   b. What positive effects have you seen on student outcomes in the inclusive setting?

   c. What classroom strategies help foster a positive inclusive environment?

   d. What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers at your school site?

3. Which leadership skills have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program?

   a. What has leadership done to support an inclusive school?

   b. What traits does your leader possess?

   c. How do you think the leadership at the school site perceives students with disabilities?

4. What are the common perceptions about best practices for inclusive education among the four groups: teachers, admin, staff, and parents?

Data Collection and Procedures

Before any data collection, the researcher obtained consent from every participant from the school district. The researcher held informational meetings outside of academic hours. Participants were asked not to identify themselves to ensure the protection of human subjects. Participants were provided an informed consent as asked for their signature. Once the participants signed the consent, their rights as participants were addressed and they had the choice to continue with the study or discontinue their participation. Consenting subjects were assigned to an alphanumeric designation to protect confidentiality. Individuals who were in agreement participated in an interview from 45 to 60 minutes. Participants had an opportunity to review transcripts to verify the accuracy of the data collected. All responses were saved via the CSUSB Google folder which is protected through an additional firewall.

Data Analysis and Procedures

The researcher recorded the interviews in order to provide a detailed record of the interview (Creswell, 2015). Along with the recording, the researcher also took notes to provide additional documentation. Data was analyzed qualitatively as a result of the questions measuring best practices and perceived ability. For the responses, the researcher determined code words and phrases to find common themes. The themes allowed the researcher to create a synthesis between the participants. Lastly, the results were utilized and compared to other results of similar studies to add to the research. (Creswell, 2015)

Research Quality Assurance

The demand for research about best practices for an inclusive classroom is riveting. This study explores the beliefs, experiences, resources, training, reflections, and actions of a group of participants. The knowledge and information gathered through the one-to-one interviews may impact school districts or sites. The study intends to bring together the experiences and knowledge about practices that will lend themselves to an inclusive setting.

Limitations to the Study

The demand for research about how to effectively implement an inclusive setting is significant, however, this study is limited by individual interviews that measure stakeholders perceived best practices. The knowledge that is gathered through this study may impact the site administrators productively and positively. Participation in the interviews is voluntary, therefore responses are limited to their willingness. Lastly, the study is limited to one school district in Southern California and does not give ample representation of the region.

Validity and Trustworthiness/Reliability

To ensure that bias does not affect the interpretation of this study the researcher collected data directly from the participants. Through the analysis, interpretation, and conclusion process, the researcher convinced readers that the information discussed is credible. The researcher made sure to be consistent for dependability. The triangulation process is a step that was taken by the researcher. It will include sorting of the data to find common themes and semi

structured one-on-one interviews with various groups of individuals closely involved in inclusive education (Creswell & Miller, 2009).

Member checking was utilized because it is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.134). Through this process, the researcher took the interview transcriptions and interpretations back to the participants to confirm that the information is correct. The participants were able to make corrections if necessary to protect the credibility of this study. These member checks were completed in a follow-up interview.

Positionality of the Researcher

One bias the researcher has towards the research study is that some participants have more experience with inclusive education and are more involved with the process. When interviewing participants, the researcher made sure to keep an open mind. Data collected by the participants during the one-on-one interviews will be the only data analyzed. There is a possibility that positionality was influenced in this study to some extent.

Ethical Concerns

The researcher made sure that ethics remained a priority throughout this study. Ensuring validity and reliability of the study was done by following the methods. Prior to each interview, the informed consent form was read to each participant. The risks in this study were minimal. The potential risk to the participants were minimal. Possible minimal risks include exposure to some personal information to the researcher, potential for participation to be inferred

through interaction with the researcher, and the possibility of the interview question will bring up something that may involve negative or emotional reactions. In order to protect the research participants, information was confidential. No identifiable names, schools, or districts were reported in the study. Participants were reminded not to state students' names or personal details during the interview discussion, as they run the risk of violating their students' privacy. Participants were also be reminded to speak about general issues rather than particular ones that could potentially identify an individual. The researcher understood the possible risk to individuals if personal identifiable information is used; therefore, a number was used to identify the participants (ex: Teacher 1).

Summary

The research study was conducted at a diverse, Southern California school district, Destined School District. Various stakeholders that are closely related to the inclusion programs were interviewed. The number of participants, along with the criteria for participation were also addressed in this chapter. An interview protocol that consists of semi-structured questions was developed to conduct one-on-one interviews with up to twenty participants. The researcher presented the plan to collect and analyze the data provided by the study, as well as the measures for reliability. In summary, the interviews of elementary school teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents who voluntarily participated were conducted using the following steps:

1. Participants were identified.

2. Participants were recruited by email.

3. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, an alphanumeric designation was

assigned

to ensure confidentiality.

4. The researcher contacted each participant and scheduled a time and place to

meet or if they preferred Zoom.

5. The researcher returned their responses for review or to make additions.

6. The participants' responses were analyzed.

8. Electronic mail and transcripts were deleted from the computer.

     Chapter Four will present the results of the qualitative case study that will

be conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

As discussed in Chapter One, there is no agreement on which specific resources, training, or support are related to inclusive practices, which is vital to allow the current students with disabilities to be taught in regular education classrooms (Faraclas, 2018; Hines, 2001). Stakeholders have found it challenging to develop and seek recommendations on implementing inclusive education and finding examples of proven best practices in inclusive education reform (Hayes and Bulat, 2017). The research determined that the reason for these challenges is that no common concept of inclusive education applies across all context areas.

This study aims to add to the body of knowledge in the area of effective best practices for inclusive education. The findings from this study can be utilized to address a gap in the literature, which does not address the needs of school districts, specifically educational leadership practices, training, and resources toward inclusive education. The participants in this study provided valuable insights as to what is needed to promote a successful inclusive school and the benefits of inclusive education they have experienced.

Sample Demographics

The participants in this study were individuals that were teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents in a large district in Southern California. There were no set criteria for individuals participating in the study, except that they had

to have experience with inclusive practices with the school district. Individuals who participated first were asked to recruit others with experience with inclusive practices (Creswell, 2013). The twenty participants who were selected for this study provided an abundance of knowledge about inclusive education. The participants were individuals who had personal experience with inclusive education. Participants of the study were most likely willing to participate when referred by a colleague or someone they knew.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

	Parents	Teacher	Support Staff	Administrators
Gender	100% female	100% female	80% female 20% male	100% female
Experience with Special Education	100% have a child in an inclusion class	100% are co-teachers in an inclusion classroom	100% experienced with inclusion classrooms	100% experienced with inclusion classrooms
Years in the District	80% 1-5 years 20% 5-10 years	100% 1-5 years	40% 1-5 years 40% 5-10 years 20% 10-15 years	40% 5-10 years 60% 10-15 years

Participant 1 (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 serves as an elementary school special education teacher in an inclusion classroom. The participant has worked for various administrators and school sites within the school district as an elementary special education teacher.

<u>Participant 2 (Teacher 2)</u>

Teacher 2 serves as an elementary school general education teacher in an inclusion classroom. The participant has worked for the same administrators and has been at one school site within the unified school district as an elementary general education teacher.

<u>Participant 3 (Teacher 3)</u>

Teacher 3 serves as an elementary school special education teacher in an inclusion classroom. The participant has worked for various administrators at one school site within the unified school district as an elementary special education teacher.

<u>Participant 4 (Teacher 4)</u>

Teacher 4 serves as an elementary school special education teacher in an inclusion classroom. The participant has worked for the same administrators at one school site within the unified school district as an elementary special education teacher.

<u>Participant 5 (Teacher 5)</u>

Teacher 5 serves as an elementary school general education teacher in an inclusion classroom. The participant has worked for the same administrators and has been at one school site within the unified school district as an elementary general education teacher.

Participant 6 (Support Staff 1)

Support Staff 1 serves as a special education teacher on assignment at an inclusion elementary school. The participant has worked for the same administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

Participant 7 (Support Staff 2)

Support Staff 2 serves as a teacher on assignment at an elementary school site where inclusion is practiced. The participant has worked for various administrators at various school sites within the unified school district.

Participant 8 (Support Staff 3)

Support Staff 3 serves as a teacher on assignment at an inclusion elementary school. The participant has worked for various administrators at various school sites within the unified school district.

Participant 9 (Support Staff 4)

Support Staff 4 serves as an early childhood education assistant in an inclusion elementary classroom. The participant has worked for various administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

Participant 10 (Support Staff 5)

Support Staff 5 serves as an early childhood education assistant in an inclusion elementary classroom. The participant has worked for various administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

Participant 11 (Administrator 1)

Administrator 1 serves as an assistant principal at an elementary school that practices inclusion. The participant has worked as an administrator at one school site within the unified school district.

Participant 12 (Administrator 2)

Administrator 2 serves as an assistant principal at an inclusion elementary school. The participant has worked as an administrator at one school site within the unified school district.

Participant 13 (Administrator 3)

Administrator 3 serves as a principal on assignment that oversees inclusion programs. The participant has worked as an administrator at various school sites within the unified school district.

Participant 14 (Administrator 4)

Administrator 4 serves as an assistant principal at an inclusion elementary school. The participant has worked as an administrator at various school sites within the unified school district.

Participant 15 (Administrator 5)

Administrator 5 serves as an assistant principal at an elementary school that practices inclusion. The participant has worked as an administrator at various school sites within the unified school district.

<u>Participant 16 (Parent 1)</u>

Parent 1 has a child in a preschool inclusion classroom and a kindergarten inclusion classroom. The participant has interacted with the same administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

<u>Participant 17 (Parent 2)</u>

Parent 2 has a child in a preschool inclusion classroom and a first-grade inclusion classroom. The participant has interacted with the same administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

<u>Participant 18 (Parent 3)</u>

Parent 3 has a child in a fifth-grade inclusion classroom, a middle school general education classroom, and a high school general education classroom. The participant has interacted with various administrators at various school sites within the unified school district.

<u>Participant 19 (Parent 4)</u>

Parent 4 has a child in a sixth-grade inclusion classroom and an eighth-grade general education classroom. The participant has interacted with various administrators at various school sites within the unified school district.

<u>Participant 20 (Parent 5)</u>

Parent 5 has a child in a transitional kindergarten inclusion classroom. The participant has interacted with the same administrators at one school site within the unified school district.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board (IRB), data was collected from the twenty participating teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents in Southern California. This study adds to the body of knowledge to support the understanding of inclusive education best practices and the support required to promote student success through the analysis and identification of commonalities among participant responses.

The researcher created the interview protocol, which included semi-structured interview questions that would inform the research questions one-three. Participants were assigned an alphanumeric key to protect their confidentiality. The participants were allowed to review their responses to add, respond, or build on their initial responses. This process was reviewed during the informed consent process.

Data Analysis

The participants were allowed to verify their responses to ensure accuracy through member checking (Creswell, 2013). It was determined that a qualitative design would identify themes, patterns, and categories that will contribute to a better understanding of what best practices support inclusive education (Creswell, 2013). The researcher reviewed the data and created a coding system that would organize the responses. After reading each verified transcript thoroughly to ensure understanding, the researcher highlighted keywords that

would be used as themes. Similar words began to stand out to the researcher, while in the coding process. The themes that were mentioned by more than one participant were then placed on a table in correlation to the eleven questions asked to the participants. Similar themes that were identified in three out of the four groups of participants were bolded to show the similarities. For example, training on special education was determined to be an important aspect of inclusive education by the participants, therefore it was bolded, to show that it was brought up in three out of four groups of individuals.

<div align="center">Validity and Reliability</div>

Validity is defined as whether or not the research truly measured what it was intended to measure (Creswell, 2013; Joppe, 2000). Reliability is defined as consistent results over a period that becomes an accurate representation of the study population (Joppe, 2000). In short, reliability is consistency, and validity is accuracy in a study. Every research study must have validity and reliability.

One factor that may impact the validity of the research study is the population was not clearly defined. There were no criteria for age, education, or any other background information. In addition, unclear vocabulary or lack of experience can obscure the responses. Reliability can be affected when a participant may not feel motivated to participate in the study, or may not be feeling well. A participant's attitude or mood could also affect the reliability of the study. Since the measure was only administered once, stability could be affected.

Reliability and validity are envisioned as being trustworthy, rigorous, and quality work in the qualitative paradigm (Golafshani, 2015). The way the researcher strived to achieve validity and reliability of research was to eliminate bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness (Golafshani, 2015). This was done through a detailed description of the data collected. Interviews were organized to gather a detailed perspective of the best practices and support necessary to implement inclusive education. Interview results were analyzed to determine and interpret findings (Creswell, 2015). Member checking was used to allow participants to verify the data that was collected from the study (Creswell, 2015). Once participants gave the final approval, the data was then analyzed and coded.

Research Findings

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program?" The researcher compiled the following four questions for Research Question 1, "Which training do you find most beneficial for an inclusive environment? What resources do you feel are necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting? Does your school site use a framework to promote inclusive education? What is it? Is it effective? How much time do you feel is necessary to fully implement an inclusive classroom?" The themes that emerged for these questions were as follows: (1a) Training on Instructional Practice, (1b) Training in Special Education, (1c) Training on Inclusion, (1d) Training on Models of Inclusion, (2a)

Planning Time (4a) Unlimited Amount of Time to Implement an Inclusive

Classroom. Participants were asked to reflect on the most beneficial training for

an inclusive environment. The responses from the participants of all subgroups

are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

Interview Question 1 Which training do you find most beneficial for an inclusive environment? –Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
	Teachers	
Social Emotional Learning	3	37.5%
Instructional Practices	**3**	**37.5%**
Models of Inclusion	**2**	**25%**
Total	8	100%
	Support Staff	
Special Education	**3**	**27%**
Instructional Practices	**2**	**18%**
Behavioral Support	2	18%
Models of Inclusion	**2**	**18%**
Inclusion	**2**	**18%**
Total	11	99%
Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
	Administrators	
Instructional Practices	**4**	**29%**
Special Education	**2**	**14%**
MTSS	2	14%
Models of Inclusion	**2**	**14%**
Inclusion	**2**	**14%**
Cultural Practices	2	14%
Total	14	99%
	Parents	
Inclusion	**3**	**50%**
Special Education	**3**	**50%**
Total	6	100%
Response	Participants	% to Total Participants
	Major Themes	
1a. Instructional Practices	9	45%
1b. Special Education	8	40%

1c. Inclusion	7	35%
1d. Models of Inclusion	6	30%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 2 demonstrates that participating support staff, administrators, and parents

believe that training on instructional practices (45% of participants) would benefit

an inclusive environment. The next most popular response came from teacher,

support staff, and administrator participants indicating that training on special

education (40% of participants) would benefit an inclusive environment. The next

highest response rate came from support staff, administrators, and parents,

where participants indicated training on inclusion (35% of participants) would be

beneficial for an inclusive environment. Lastly, teachers, support staff, and

administrator participants indicated that training on the models of inclusion (30%

of participants) would be most beneficial for an inclusive environment.

Theme 1a. Training on Instructional Practices. This theme emerged from

the responses of nine of the twenty participants (45%). The following excerpts

from the interviews support the theme:

> I also think Kagan Cooperative Learning and Engagement strategies are huge for creating an inclusive environment. I would say to become an inclusive school that, everyone should be Kagan trained, and everyone should be implementing the practices daily because that lets all levels of learners be successful and supported by their peers or their teachers, or any other staff. (Admin 3)

> Universal Design for Learning. I thought that training was really beneficial because in that training we learned how to kind of identify the different needs. And then it was like scaffolding, but more than scaffolding. So really designing the instruction to meet all of those different needs, but also tapping into how students can express their learning in a variety of ways. (Admin 5)

Definitely having one that is going to include differentiated strategies for students with special needs or an IEP. So, the curriculum has to be, in my opinion, accessible to all students. (Teacher 2)

Theme 1b. Training in Special Education. This theme emerged from the responses of eight of the twenty participants (40%). The following excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

I'm always pushing, advocating, and hoping that everybody in this classroom has special education training. Even if they are not teachers or certificated staff, I feel they're involved in the program. It is so important that at least they have a basic understanding of the law, why we're doing it, what we're doing, and how we're doing it. (Teacher 1)

I think training in special education is for everyone because as a parent, I didn't know what to expect with my son, so I didn't know what was available. I didn't know what different things I could try. But when he started school, it's like we send them to school, and we would like to know everyone is trained, special education wise, or comfortable. (Parent 5)

I also think it's super important that the teachers understand accommodations. They understand how to read IEP goals. The gen ed teacher understands that they're an equal part of that relationship and that it's not just the sped teacher who takes those things, and I just need to worry about gen ed. But what does, what do accommodations look like? How do I support modifications in the classroom? How do I differentiate to make sure that I'm meeting the needs of all of my students? (Support Staff 1)

Theme 1c. Training on Inclusion. This theme emerged from the responses of seven of the twenty participants (55%). The following excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

At the beginning of this school year, we had a TOA who ran an inclusion training meeting. And in that meeting, we had time. We went over the different co-teaching models. We also had time to talk with our co-teaching partners about different strategies we want to implement in our classroom and what our expectations will be. The TOA also had different examples of things that we can implement in the classroom together as a

teacher. Like, just as far as sending out a letter to parents and making sure that we're including both of our names. (Teacher 3)

Most people don't know what an inclusive classroom is. The training not only defined what an inclusive classroom is or an inclusive learning environment, but it also showed the different types of inclusion models. So that was really helpful because it just gave some clarity. If you are going to promote an inclusive learning environment, you need to make sure everyone has the same vocabulary, the same definition, the same understanding, and the same goal. (Admin 4)

I think just understanding what it means to be inclusive. I know myself; I have four children and my last two, my daughter who's 14, and my son, both have had IEPs. My daughter is now on a 504 plan, and my son just recently was diagnosed with autism. (Parent 3)

If they have training on inclusion for all students. I feel like it would make the parents more comfortable. It can make the child definitely more comfortable, which is the goal. And even the teachers or admin, there are moments where they probably don't know how to handle this situation. But if training is made available, I'm sure it just makes everyone more comfortable all around. (Parent 5)

As a district, I can see that because if there was a clear understanding of what inclusion looks like, I think that the support and the training that teachers were getting would be very different. It wouldn't be so reliant on just the school site, which isn't horrible. Like at this site, we have a lot of resources, but I mean, they're all very much needed here and everyone is so busy doing their one job that it's so difficult to, to be able to provide that extra support, that extra training, that extra mentorship that I, I think teachers would benefit from. (Support Staff 3)

Theme 1d. Training on Models of Inclusion. This theme emerged from the responses of six of the twenty participants (30%). The following excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

I also think they really need support and training and models of what an inclusive teaching practice looks like. So, what are the different models of co-teaching? If I'm taking the lead, then what is my partner doing to make sure that all students are getting the most they can out of having an inclusive environment. (Support Staff 1)

> Special education training for inclusion teachers so teachers can see in person what inclusion looks like in different classrooms and what the different models are. This will help them have a better understanding. (Admin 1)

Participants were asked to reflect on what resources they felt necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting. The responses from the participants of each subgroup are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3

Interview Question 2 What resources do you feel are necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
Planning Time	**4**	**32%**
Curricular Support	2	17%
Collaboration Time	2	17%
Manipulatives	2	17%
Low Student to Staff Ratio	2	17%
Total	12	100%
Support Staff		
Planning Time	**4**	**32%**
Personnel	2	17%
Collaboration Time	2	17%
Training	2	17%
Parent Resources	2	17%
Total	12	100%
Administrators		
Literature to Support Inclusion	4	40%
Planning Time	**2**	**20%**
Personnel	2	20%
Instructional Material	2	20%
Total	10	100%
Parents		
Parent Resources	3	60%
Training	2	40%
Total	5	100%
Response	Participants	% to Total Participants

	Major Theme	
2a. Planning Time	10	50%

Table 3 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, and administrators believe planning time (50% of participants) was a necessary resource to facilitate an inclusive classroom.

Theme 2a. Planning Time. This theme emerged from the responses of ten of the twenty participants (50%). The following excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

> One of the biggest resources is our planning time. So, we can collaborate together and map out what we want to teach. Who's going to tackle what piece, and how are we going to support each other? If _____ is teaching, what does she want to see me doing to support her? She's really good at letting me know, today we're going to be having the children do some interactive reading. I really see these three kids need support. And she'll tell the team, hey, can you make sure that you're sitting near or with these kids and support them? And I try to do the same also. This is what my lesson is going to look like. I need help with collaborative conversations. I'm going to have them pair up, and make sure these kids they're going to need help finding their partner or they're going to need sentence stems to prompt them to participate. That's for me, our time together. (Teacher 5)

> At the minimum my teacher and I need at least an hour a week just for planning purposes, going over accommodations, lessons that we're going to implement, and strategies that we're going to be using at, at the minimum. We utilize pretty much an hour of planning time a week. (Teacher 3)

> So right now, I feel proud of what we're doing in the classroom and I feel like we are having some success in our preschool program. And I feel that a lot of it, it's because I'm having more planning time with my staff. If the GenEd teachers are planning, I make sure that I'm there or that I'm listening to what they're saying and giving my ideas. I get to see what they're going to be learning, and what they're going to be learning for that week. So, I get to make choices as to: do I have to incorporate more visuals? Do I have to incorporate some kind of other technology so my student is engaged? There is no possible way that I can do this if I'm not involved in that. I just can't. So, the inclusion will, it turns out to be more

like parallel teaching or providing services or pushing because inclusion, true inclusion, it's really, you come into the classroom and you don't know who is who. And the only way to do that is if you're involved in every process of everything that needs to be done from signing in, the kids check in to dismissal. So, time with collaboration would be, in my opinion, what would be very important to implement an inclusive classroom. (Teacher 1)

Participants were asked to reflect on whether or not their school site used a framework to promote inclusive education and if they felt the framework was effective. The responses from the participants of the subgroups are shown below in Table 4.

Table 4

Interview Question 3 Does your school site use a framework to promote inclusive education? What is it? Is it effective? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
PBIS	4	67%
Inclusion Program	2	33%
Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Total	6	100%
Support Staff		
PBIS	2	100%
Total	2	100%
Administrators		
MTSS	3	60%
Inclusion Program	2	40%
Total	5	100%
Parents		
MTSS	2	100%
Total	2	100%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 4 demonstrates that there was no agreement as to what framework would best support inclusive education.

Participants were asked to reflect on how much time they felt was necessary to implement an inclusive classroom fully. The responses from the participants of all subgroups are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5

Interview Question 4 How much time do you feel is necessary to fully implement an inclusive classroom? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
	Teachers	
Unlimited Amount of Time	**4**	**100%**
Total	4	100%
	Support Staff	
Unlimited Amount of Time	**3**	**60%**
5+ Years	2	40%
Total	5	100%
	Administrators	
Unlimited Amount of Time	**3**	**100%**
Total	3	100%
	Parents	
Unlimited Amount of Time	**5**	**100%**
Total	5	100%
Response	Participants	% to Total Participants
	Major Theme	
4a. Unlimited Amount of Time	15	75%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 5 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents find that it takes an unlimited amount of time (75% of participants) to implement an inclusive classroom fully.

<u>Theme 4a. Unlimited Amount of Time to Implement an Inclusive</u>

<u>Classroom.</u> This theme emerged from the responses of fifteen of the twenty

participants (75%). The following interview excerpts support the theme:

> I think it takes a career. It would take a long time to be able to really feel like, okay, I've really got it down because every year the variables change, and so when you think you've got something down and then you get new kiddos or now you have an instructional aide like it's sometimes it feels like you're back to square one. I'd be concerned if anyone ever said we've perfected this. I would say, okay, then it's time to retire because you're not in a learner mindset anymore. (Support Staff 1)

> Ongoing preparation is needed between the teachers. Constant reflection will dictate if a planning day or a smaller session is needed. It just takes a lot of time. (Admin 1)

> I like this question because to me, again, it's you're building that mindset and it's just ongoing. It's happening all day long. It's the center of everything you do. So, it's very time-consuming, but it's also very beneficial. Make your job more enjoyable. The kids are going to behave better and they're going to be more attentive. And so, taking that time, especially at the beginning of the year to build that inclusive environment where kids feel welcome, appreciated, heard equal, and then it's just ongoing. You have to just keep that mindset. (Admin 3)

> I think it's important to continue on the training just so we don't forget about those training skills that we learned at some point so that they can continue on. (Parent 2)

> I don't think you can set a time for it because of the changes, there are students that come in and they can have a good day. We just talked about a good day today and a rough day we will tomorrow. It's something that you're always constantly thinking about, talking about implementing. So, it can't be where, oh, just because I tried the strategy or this happened, or I'm doing this for the student, meeting the needs today doesn't mean that it's going to function tomorrow. So, it's having all your tricks and being ready to see what works for that child. So yes, it's continuous; it's like every day of the year. (Parent 3)

> I think there is no time. I think it takes constant commitment because there are so many different aspects. It's just such a full spectrum of just different little personalities, different, you know, even for the adults though, it's like

it's never-ending. It's inclusivity, you know, just for all, and so that's continuous. (Parent 5)

I think it takes a while because it takes a lot to form that team and collaboration among teachers. So as for myself, this is my third year at this school site. And at the beginning, it was a little difficult to try to collaborate and learn each other's personalities as far as the GenEd and SpEd collaboration and with instructional assistants too. (Teacher 2)

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?" The corresponding interview questions were, "What inclusive instructional practices are most effective on student outcomes? What positive effects have you seen on student outcomes in the inclusive setting? What classroom strategies help foster a positive, inclusive environment? What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers at your school site?" The themes that emerged were as follows: (5a) Peer Modeling, (6a) Increase in Social Skills, (6b) Increase in Relationship Building, (7a) Expectations for a Positive Classroom Environment.

Participants were asked to reflect on which instructional practices they believed to be most effective on student outcomes. The responses from the participants of all groups are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6

Interview Question 5 What inclusive instructional practices are most effective on student outcomes? –Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
	Teachers	
Peer Modeling	**3**	**21%**
Visual Support	3	21%
Small Group Instruction	2	14%

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
SEL	2	14%
Differentiation	2	14%
Individualized Intervention	2	14%
Total	14	98%
Support Staff		
Small Group Instruction	3	25%
Co-Teaching Model	3	25%
Engagement	2	16.5%
Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Small Class Ratio	2	16.5%
Individualized Intervention	2	16.5%
Total	12	99.5%
Administrators		
Collaborative Learning	3	25%
Peer Modeling	**3**	**25%**
Relationship Building	2	16.5%
Emphasis on Inclusivity	2	16.5%
Incorporate all Modalities	2	16.5%
Total	12	99.5%
Parents		
Hands-on Activities	2	33%
Peer Modeling	**2**	**33%**
Incorporate all Modalities	2	33%
Total	6	99%
Response	Participants	% to Total Participants
Major Theme		
5a. Peer Modeling	8	40%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 6 demonstrates that participating teachers, administrators, and parents

believe that peer modeling (40% of participants) is one of the most effective

instructional practices for student outcomes.

Theme 5a. Peer Modeling. This theme emerged from the responses of

eight of the twenty participants (40%). The following excerpts from the interviews

support the theme:

Even peer modeling, that's definitely important. Because I know with my son he's grown so much, just seeing his peers, oh, we're all sitting down. (Parent 5)

Another good example would be I have a student who doesn't have expressive language yet. He's a non-speaking student and now he's using single words, but a lot of times his behavior, it's very different from the other kids. So, they'll start to wonder why, why doesn't he doesn't understand the social cues when it's dancing time. He goes to the front of the classroom, why can't he stay in his spot? So, they learn to accept it. And then the teachers are so important at this point because you get to tell them, Hey, you know, he's learning. You already learned it. You know how to do it. Let's teach him. You know, and you make him part of it. You don't just tell them, Hey, be patient. They get to experience this. (Teacher 1)

A lot of modeling, not only from the teachers but peer modeling too. (Teacher 2)

A lot of social emotional, actual language, you know, communications skills because of the peer models that, especially for the kids with special needs. Even without the IEP like the gen ed kids, who need that modeling, that opportunity to interact with the other kids. I think that's what it is. Just being in one classroom together with those different types of skills and needs and, you know, benefiting from each other. (Teacher 4)

Participants were asked to reflect on what positive effects they have seen

on student outcomes in the inclusive setting. The responses from the

participants of each subgroup are shown below in Table 7.

Table 7

Interview Question 6 What positive effects have you seen on student outcomes in the inclusive setting? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
Social Skills	**4**	**32%**
Peer Acceptance	2	17%
Relationship Building	**2**	**17%**
Language Development	2	17%
Communication Skills	2	17%

Total	12	100%
Support Staff		
Behavioral	4	50%
Academics	2	25%
Social Skills	**2**	**25%**
Total	8	100%
Administrators		
Social Skills	**5**	**38%**
Confidence	2	15.5%
Leadership Skills	2	15.5%
Relationship Building	**2**	**15.5%**
Academics	2	15.5%
Total	13	100%
Parents		
Social Skills	4	50%
Confidence	2	25%
Relationship Building	**2**	**25%**
Total	8	100%
Response	Participants	% to Total Participants
Major Themes		
6a. Social Skills	15	75%
6c. Relationship Building	6	30%

Table 7 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, administrators,

and parents have seen growth in social skills (75% of participants) in the

inclusive setting. Participating teachers, administrators, and parents have seen a

development in relationship building (30% of participants) in the inclusive setting.

Theme 6a. Increase in Social Skills. This theme emerged from the

responses of fifteen of the twenty participants (75%). The following excerpts from

the interviews support the theme:

First of all, the biggest are compassion, empathy, and tolerance. They learn this. They, they, you start them at this age with inclusion. And you start really fitting into that character of being a good partner of being tolerant of being patient. Because you do get to see that other students and other classmates might need a little extra time or need extra breaks or sometimes they don't understand, like, why does he get to hold the fidget? You know, they get to practice that not only, because we tell kids all the

time, be kind, be nice, be tolerant, but what is it to be, you know? And here in an inclusion program, you learn to be with everyone every single day. You learn it because you see it. You explained to them, well so and so might need this because he needs a little time. (Teacher 1)

Well, my oldest was in special education preschool. She did transfer out into a kinder inclusion class. Emotionally, she's doing great. She used to be a little bit more scared of like even writing her name or doing homework. (Parent 1)

At school, he has shown us like, oh, I can follow directions for even a longer period of time. And yeah, definitely the peer, like, you know but that was a perfect example cause we've seen like, oh wow, he's, it took a couple of months, but now he's sitting in the little group with the kids and you know, he's joining alongside them and sitting and actually engaging and that's amazing to see cuz it's such a difference from the beginning of the school year. (Parent 5)

Theme 6b. Increase in Relationship Building. This theme emerged from

the responses of six of the twenty participants (30%). The following excerpts from

the interviews support the theme:

So, gen ed and special ed benefited from friendships, benefiting from growing empathy for others, helping others, and watching. We had wheelchair assistance and the kids would help the kids around the campus. It just benefits everybody and benefits the teachers or they see this interaction happening between the kids. (Admin 3)

Once they had we created that community of just learners and friends. And even with my own children, I know being Hispanic or Mexican, those are taboo. Those are things you don't talk about that your child has a learning disability in the way where, okay, how is my child learning what works for her or him? (Parent 3)

I've seen so much growth in so many of my students. And I think a lot of it is because they have those peer models and we focus on making it inclusive. So, we focus a lot on building those relationships among students and with the teachers too. So, I've seen a lot of growth in all of the students. (Teacher 2)

Participants were asked to reflect on what classroom strategies help foster a

positive inclusive environment. The responses from the participants of the

subgroups are shown below in Table 8.

Table 8

Interview Question 7 What classroom strategies help foster a positive inclusive
environment? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
	Teachers	
Expectations	**4**	**31%**
Structure	3	23%
Sense of Community	2	15%
PBIS Strategies	2	15%
Positive Reinforcement	2	15%
Total	13	99%
	Support Staff	
Sense of Community	3	23%
SEL	2	15%
Expectations	**2**	**15%**
Positive Redirection	2	15%
Structure	2	15%
Classroom Management	2	15%
Total	13	98%
	Administrators	
Expectations	**3**	**21%**
Collaborative Learning	3	21%
Kagan Strategies	2	14%
Social Skills	2	14%
Positive Reinforcement	2	14%
PBIS Strategies	2	14%
Total	14	98%

	Parents	
Social Skills	2	100%
Total	2	100%
Responses	Participants	% to Total Participants
	Major Theme	
7a.Expectations	9	45%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 8 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, and

administrators believe having expectations (45% of participants) help foster an

inclusive environment.

Theme 7a. Expectations for a Positive Classroom Environment. This

theme emerged from the responses of nine of the twenty participants (45%). The

following excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

I believe both my partner teacher and I have very high expectations for
students. And we might come out as very soft for some people, like very
tolerant. But I always feel that that is my job. My job is to use what I
learned the strategies and that I've learned in school to help students. You
know, succeed, not focusing too much on scolding and, the whole time
using consequences. Yes. Yes. We have to teach them consequences
because that's part of it. But we don't focus on just the negative behavior
that we see. We focus mostly on positive behavior and when negative
behavior has to be addressed because that's the reality. (Teacher 1)

We are also setting high standards and expectations for our whole bunch.
So, we don't have different expectations because it's an inclusive
program. And so, what we do is to make sure that we're choosing those
kids that might, you know, be almost non-verbal when they start, you
know, we are doing equity sticks and doing a lot of sentence framing for
them and a lot of partners talking and asking them to reiterate what did
your partner say? So, while we're hitting the curriculum, we're really
pushing that social and verbalization part. So those strategies I've seen
once we implemented or once I started doing that, I really saw some of the
kids' skill set improved. (Teacher 5)

Implementing the community circles, also having clear expectations for
students, I mean, just like any classroom high expectations expect you
know, of course, we provide accommodations and modifications for

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students with special needs, but, they're given high expectations just like the rest of the students in the classroom. There's, you know, they're held to the same standard given those extra supports and those accommodations. And I think that's important for gen ed students to see as well that everyone here is responsible for doing their work for completing assignments. It just looks a little bit different. (Teacher 3)

Students who don't know what their expectations are not going to do well in the classroom. They need to know exactly what they're going to be doing. And then also setting up a culture within the classroom of what is expected from students and what is expected from the teacher, from the educator, right? And then how that aligns with what's expected as a school. So those are strategies that have worked and I've seen work, and I still use myself. It starts from the student to the teacher, to the classroom, to the administration of the school, and the community. (Support Staff 2)

Participants were asked to reflect on the opportunities they have been offered to collaborate with teachers at their school site. The responses from the participants of all subgroups are shown below in Table 9.

Table 9

Interview Question 8 What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers at your school site? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
Staff Meetings	2	29%
Special Education Meetings	2	29%
Peer Observations	3	42%
Total	7	100%
Support Staff		
Grade Level Meetings	2	100%
Total	2	100%
Administrators		
Data Planning Days	3	21%
PLC	3	21%
Staff Meetings	4	29%
Requested Collaborative Time	2	14%
Coaching	2	14%

Total	14	99%
Parents		
Technology Based	3	100%
Total	3	100%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 9 demonstrates that there were no commonalities on opportunities to collaborate.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "Which leadership skills have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program?" The corresponding interview questions were, "What has leadership done to support an inclusive school? What traits does your leader possess? How do you think the leadership at the school site perceives students with disabilities?" The themes that emerged were as follows: (9a) Administrators Advocate for Inclusion and (10a) Administrators are Supportive.

Participants were asked to reflect on what leadership has done to support an inclusive school. The responses from the participants of all subgroups are shown below in Table 10.

Table 10

Interview Question 9 What has leadership done to support an inclusive school? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
PD Opportunities	2	25%
Support	2	25%
Feedback	2	25%
Advocate for Inclusion	**2**	**25%**
Total	8	100%

	Support Staff	
Advocate for Inclusion	**2**	**18%**
Time	2	18%
Funding	2	18%
Observations	2	18%
Support	3	27%
Total	11	99%
	Administrators	
Provide Resources	2	18%
Advocate for Inclusion	**4**	**36%**
Inclusive of all Staff	3	27%
Empower Staff	2	18%
Total	11	99%
	Parents	
Comforting Families	2	18.75%
Inclusive After School Programs	2	18.75%
Total	16	100%
Responses	Participants	% to Total Participants
	Major Theme	
9a. Advocate for Inclusion	8	40%

Table 10 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, and

administrators believe that administrators advocate for inclusion (40% of

participants) to support an inclusive school.

Theme 9a. Administrators Advocate for Inclusion. This theme emerged

from the responses of eight of the twenty participants (40%). The following

excerpts from the interviews support the theme:

I know our principal supports the program and champions that program. (Teacher 3)

I've heard our principal, _____, likes to champion the program. I know that she has said that she's gone to bat to keep the program. She seems to feel very passionately about the inclusive program. (Teacher 5)

I want to build inclusion with, you know, the custodian with the cafeteria worker, that everybody feels responsible. So, it's hard to just be in the second year at this site to lead in that way, but that is where I'm going. Those are the conversations I'm having. That's how I feel we need to start to really build that mindset. So first it's like getting that all means all attitude and then we can move forward. (Admin 4)

Participants were asked to reflect on what traits their leadership possesses that support inclusive education. The responses from the participants of each subgroup are shown below in Table 11.

Table 11

Interview Question 10 What traits does your leader possess? – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
Positive	3	33%
Professional	2	22%
Supportive	**2**	**22%**
Helpful	2	22%
Total	9	99%
Support Staff		
Trusting	2	33%
Supportive	**4**	**67%**
Total	6	100%
Administrators		
Open-Minded	3	43%
Reflective	2	28.5%
Student-Centered	2	28.5%
Total	7	100%
Parents		
Approachable	3	30%
Communicative	3	30%
Supportive	**2**	**20%**
Hands-on	2	20%
Total	10	100%
Responses	Participants	% to Total Participants
Major Theme		
10a. Supportive	8	40%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 11 demonstrates that participating teachers, support staff, and parents feel

their administrators are supportive (40% of participants).

Theme 10a. Administrators are Supportive. This theme emerged from the

responses of four of the twenty participants (20%). The following excerpts from

the interviews support the theme:

> I would just say being supportive of the inclusion program and respecting teachers' opinions when it comes to particular students because like I said earlier, one of the key ingredients to a successful inclusion program is having the right students or having students that best fit this type of setting. (Admin 2)

> In the IEP meeting the vice principal or the assistant principal of my kids' school, was there during the meeting and that's when we found out that he was autistic. We had no idea and she was so supportive and so personable. It didn't seem like she was the assistant principal, the way she spoke with us, she just related a lot to me. (Parent 2)

> I think they do a really good job with that now. And when I felt like they weren't doing a good job with that. Like we had a meeting and when I pointed out the stuff that I felt like she was really, the principal at that time was actually really like, whoa. Like I didn't realize that. And she was willing to be vulnerable and listen and learn from it. And it did change after that meeting. So, and I think since then it has continued to, you know, support the kids that do have disabilities there. And it should be like that since the school is labeled as such. (Parent 4)

Participants were asked to reflect on how they feel leadership perceives students

with disabilities. The responses from the participants of the subgroups are shown

below in Table 12.

Table 12

*Interview Question 11 How do you think the leadership at the school site
perceives students with disabilities?* – Two or More Responses

Response	Total Responses	% to Total Responses
Teachers		
Respect	2	28.5%
Inclusive	3	43%
Relationship Building	2	28.5%
Total	7	100%
Support Staff		
Focused on Abilities	2	33%
Priority	2	33%
Relationship Building	2	33%
Total	6	99%
Administrators		
Focused on Abilities	4	67%
Embrace Differences	2	33%
Total	6	100%
Parents		
Inclusive	3	100%
Total	3	100%

*Did not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 12 demonstrates that there were no commonalities on how administrators

perceived students with disabilities.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "What are the common perceptions about

best practices for inclusive education among the four groups: teachers, admin,

staff, and parents?" This question provided a space where the researcher

reviewed the data to identify what best practices for inclusive education were

perceived by the four groups.

Table 13

Research Question 4 What are the common perceptions about best practices for inclusive education among the four groups: teachers, admin, staff, and parents? – Three or More Responses

Responses	Participants	% to Total Participants
Best Practices		
a. Instructional Practices	9	45%
b. Special Education	8	40%
c. Inclusion	7	35%
d. Models of Inclusion	6	30%
e. Planning Time	10	50%
f. Peer Modeling as an Instructional Practice	8	40%
g. Expectations	9	45%
h. Administrators Advocate for Inclusion	8	40%
i. Supportive Administrators	8	40%

Table 13 demonstrates the commonalities among the four groups.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the best practices as perceived

by teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents, in regard to what aspects

contribute to effective inclusive education. The participants recommended for this

study were individuals who were beneficial in providing their experiences with

inclusive education. The data for this study was collected using semi-structured

interview questions that informed the research questions. Participants were

assigned an alphanumeric identifier to protect their identity and ensure

confidentiality. The participants verified their interview responses to provide an

accurate recording and subsequent analysis. Major themes were established when thoughts and ideas appeared in three out of the four groups of individuals.

Research Question 1 asked, "In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program?" The themes that emerged for these questions were as follows: (1a) training on instructional practices, (1b) training in special education, (1c) training on inclusion, (1d) training on models of inclusion, (2a) planning time (4a) unlimited amount of time to implement an inclusive classroom. Through this study, it was determined that more than one group of individuals felt that having training on instructional practices, special education, inclusion, and models of inclusion would have the greatest impact on inclusive programs. In addition, providing educators with planning time would be vital for inclusive classrooms. Lastly, there was a consensus agreement that it takes an unlimited amount of time to fully implement an inclusive setting.

Research Question 2 asked, "Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?" The themes that emerged were as follows: (5a) peer modeling, (6a) increase in social skills, (6b) increase in relationship building, and (7a) expectations for a positive classroom environment. Based on the data analysis, there was agreement that peer modeling would be necessary instructional practice to promote student success. Additionally, expectations are crucial to encourage a positive classroom environment for students. Lastly, the only time educators reported having time to

collaborate with their peers was during staff meetings but even that time wasn't consistent.

Research Question 3 asked, "Which leadership skills have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program?" The themes that emerged were as follows: (9a) administrators advocate for inclusion (10a) administrators are supportive. Regarding leadership, participants expressed the importance of having administrators advocate for inclusion. In addition, participants believed that having supportive and inclusive leaders would ensure inclusivity.

Research Question 4 asked, "What are the common perceptions among the four groups: teachers, admin, staff, and parents?" This is where the researcher was able to determine the commonalities that the different individuals responded with to create my perceived best practices. In total twelve major themes and nine best practices were identified through the data analysis of this study. There is some agreement when it comes to the most beneficial aspects of inclusive education. This would support the gap in the literature which informed that there were no prior agreements on best practices. Through this study, nine best practices that were deemed best among the four groups, (a) training on instructional practices, (b) training on special education, (c) training on inclusion, (d) training on models of inclusion, (e) planning time, (f) peer modeling as an instructional practice, (g) expectations, (h) administrators advocate for inclusion, and (i) supportive administrators.

The interview questions were utilized to provide information for the research questions. The research questions were developed to discover the necessary aspects when implementing inclusive education.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study defines inclusive education as educating all students in the same room and supporting them to reach their full potential to lead productive lives. (Somma & Bennett, 2020; Hayes & Bulat, 2017). In today's society, it is more likely that educators will have students who have disabilities, English language learners, and those who are gifted or talented in their classrooms, and this is what makes education so "special" (Francisco et al., 2020). Although there is an increase of students with various needs, the literature revealed there was a lack of understanding of which are the most effective practices of inclusive education to the current reality at the school sites (Sloik, 2018).

Research has determined it is vital that teachers have access to adequate training and resources to ensure that inclusive education is being implemented to benefit the needs of the students (Emerson et al., 2018; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Cooper et al., 2008). In addition, there are various benefits of inclusive education for all students (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Webster, 2014; Hicks-Monroe, 2011). An inclusive leader is needed to successfully implement inclusive education, and this leader must possess certain attributes that would allow for effective leadership (Tapia & Polonskaia, 2020; Murphy, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify which best practices related to inclusive education are perceived by different stakeholders to

be most impactful. This chapter contains a discussion and future research possibilities to help answer the research questions: (R1): In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program? (R2) Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs? (R3) Which leadership attributes have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program? (R4) What are the common perceptions among the four groups: teachers, admin, staff, and parents? The components that support inclusive education consist of (a) training, (b) resources, (c) framework, (d) instructional practices, (e) classroom strategies, and (f) leadership attributes. All of these factors help contribute to an inclusive environment where all individuals are successful.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Educational Leaders</div>

Inclusive education has evolved over the years; however, the best practices of inclusive education vary from district to district. Educational leaders are responsible for making sure that inclusive programs are successful. The idea of inclusive education is intimidating. There could be many made arguments as to why inclusive education is not successful. However, when given proper support and resources are provided, the research showed the benefits of inclusive education for students with various needs. This study intended to gather insight as to what best practices are successful in inclusive settings. Empirical data that was collected was common perceptions of people who are working in

the field. There was agreement among the four groups on the types of training, resources, instructional practice, and administrator attributes needed for inclusive education.

It is my recommendation that educational leaders utilize the findings of this study to develop or strengthen their inclusive practices. After examining the literature review it was concluded that there was no agreement on training, resources, or support to promote inclusive education (Bannister-Tyrrel et al., 2018; Webster, 2014; Met Life, 2010; Katz & Mirenda, 2002). All recommendations suggested should be provided to educators, support staff, administrators, parents, and the community.

Training for Inclusive Education

This study determined that having training on instructional practices, special education, inclusion, and models of inclusion would have the greatest impact on inclusive programs. The following pieces of training should be differentiated to meet the needs of the different groups of individuals. Additionally, training should be provided to general educators and special education teachers together.

Instructional practices are various strategies necessary to support the needs of all unique learners in an inclusive classroom (Emerson et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This study suggests that training in universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and cooperative learning should be provided to educators. These strategies would design the instruction to meet the

needs of all students by allowing students to express their learning in ways that would benefit the students. These pieces of training would allow teachers to feel comfortable using these strategies in their classrooms and cater to the needs of their students.

Teacher 1 brought up the importance of everyone having "the basic understanding of the law, what we're doing it, why we're doing, and how we're doing it" (Personal Communication, January 31, 2023). This was during a discussion about all individuals being trained in special education. Parents in this study commented on how helpful training in special education was for them when their children were first diagnosed with a disability. Having training helped families understand what special education was and how their child developed. This training would also support general education teachers to better understand special education and all necessary components.

Most people don't have a clear understanding of what an inclusive classroom entail. Training on inclusive education should include a definition of what an inclusive classroom is. It is crucial to make sure everyone has the same vocabulary, the same definition, the same understanding, and the same goal when it comes to inclusion. If an inclusive environment is going to be successful, all staff members must have a good understanding of what it's like to work with people with special needs, even if it's a gifted and talented student. How do you meet their needs? How do you accelerate learning for those who are ready for more and how do you remediate and still have each other learn how the kids

learn from one another? Providing training on inclusion would be beneficial for parents to see different perspectives. When you train a parent to see how their child with an IEP would benefit from an inclusive classroom, which would include other different types of disabilities, but also students with non-disabled peers, then they're able to better clearly understand how the classroom can be run and be supportive for their child.

According to the data, 30% of the participants believe the inclusive classroom should have more than one adult in the classroom to ensure all student needs are being met. Co-teaching is when two or more individuals are in one classroom. These individuals are capitalizing on each other's strengths and expertise (Villa, 2022). In this study, support would include two co-teachers or the one teacher, one aide model. As suggested by 30% of the participants, training on the model of inclusion should be provided and include the four co-teaching models.

Table 14

Models of Inclusion

Supportive	One teacher is the lead instructor while other teachers/staff rotate among the students to provide support, collect data, or facilitate transitions
Parallel	Co-teachers are both lead instructors that work with or monitor different groups of students in different areas.
Complementary	Both teachers enhance the instruction by providing support to the other teacher.
Team	Co-teachers plan, teach, assess, and are jointly responsible for all students in the classroom.

Note. Villa, R. A. (2022). Leading an Equity-Based School. *Bayridge Consortium, Inc.*

Resources for Inclusive Education

Planning time was identified as a necessity by 50% of the participants. Data was gathered on the importance of using planning time to collaborate with one another to determine how a lesson is going to be taught, what supplemental materials are necessary, and what support will be needed. One teacher shared that she needs a minimum of one hour per week just for planning, to be able to go over the lesson, accommodations, and strategies prior to the lesson being taught. Providing planning time allows all stakeholders to provide input and ideas for the lessons. Some participants in the study also believed that collaboration time was also important. For inclusive education to be successful, there needs to be time for staff in the classroom to collaborate on a daily basis to build trust and dependability. Support staff 3 expressed that "there definitely needs to be a good time allotted for planning and for prepping as well as just good development and time spent collaborating and working well as a team (Personal Communication, March 6, 2023).

Framework for Inclusive Education

This was a weak area in the study, participants expressed that they had little knowledge about frameworks. PBIS, which is a district-adopted framework to support behavior was brought up but is not an inclusive framework. Unfortunately, parents were unaware the school district had frameworks and how they were being used. One of the frameworks this district has been utilizing with

selected schools is MTSS. A recommendation would be to train all school sites in MTSS. A framework that specifically supports inclusive practices is crucial. In addition, parents need to be informed about MTSS. Utilizing MTSS would be beneficial because of the FIA component. The FIA would assist school sites in identifying which component needs more support. Admin 5 shared that her site uses the FIA to rate how they're doing with inclusion as well as using it as a guide on how to get there (Personal Communication, March 8, 2023). The great thing about MTSS is that it can be implemented in phases and it is being monitored and improved every year.

Similarly, Bonner et al. (2004) describe an experience with organizational change, specifically a school reform initiative over six years. Through this initiative, the goal was to systematically transform a midwestern elementary school into an inclusive school community. The purpose of the study was to convey critical events, specifically, the focus on a model for special education service delivery. The table below highlights the scaffolded events that took place in each of the implementation phases.

Table 15

Organizational Change School Reform

Year 1	• Initiation of service model change • Inclusion of students with significant disabilities in kindergarten • Open forums occurred to encourage staff discussion of the changing service delivery model, one that emphasized a shift in the location of services. • Connections with the University's Institute on Community Integration were established as a way to use 'best practice' resources in inclusive education.
Year 2	• Expanding efforts • The Building-level Inclusion Committee began with an initial focus on the dissemination of information related to the Service Delivery Initiative. • Began to formally define a vision of student-centered, decision-making processes that included an emphasis on parents' experiences and instructional modification strategies. • An Instructional Assistance Team was established, offering a problem-solving structure available for addressing the needs of 'all' students. • Staff Development to build internal leadership capacity.
Year 3	• Actions to further define and develop the service model • The concept of staff development broadened to include a collaborative focus through training offered to both parents and teachers. • The school mission statement was developed with goals that reflect child-centered and team collaboration philosophies. • A service delivery model was developed which formally articulated initiative components of flexible team composition established through the problem-solving processes.
Year 4	• School-wide efforts continue • Expanded staff development targeting the support of student diversity and meeting the needs of all learners through adaptive instruction. • School and Community in Partnership (SCIP) formed that included a Family Resource Centre and other community agencies to support families.

		• Parent participation expands as building committees and staff development activities involve parents as members. • Additional problem-solving formats are offered to be more responsive to referral concerns.
Year 5		• Federal Grant funding to further support and study the school-wide inclusive practices that are connected with the school's broader inclusive reform efforts. • New principal began • Teacher interviews and support staff surveys occurred to evaluate the Service Delivery Model, including an evaluation of the Flowchart components. • Special Education Family Needs Survey conducted. School-wide Family Survey conducted.

Note. Bonner, M., Koch, T., & Langmeyer, D. (2004). Organizational Theory Applied to School Reform: A Critical Analysis. *School Psychology International*, *25*(4), 455–471.

The table reflects the timeline of significant events that reflected and shaped the development of the service delivery initiative and an inclusive vision for the school site.

Instructional Practices for Inclusive Education

Based on the data analysis, there was agreement that peer modeling would be a necessary instructional practice to promote student success. Peer support involves peers providing support to other peers to assist, build relationships, and advance in the school environment while being models of what is expected (Villa, 2022). One parent shared that she has seen so much growth in her son just because he watches his peers and mimics what they are doing. Additionally, students will be used to model expectations so not only teachers are being the models. This gives every student the opportunity to build their confidence to be a peer model. One common misconception is that only students

with special needs are benefiting from inclusive settings when in reality it's the entire classroom. A recommendation is that all stakeholders are informed on what peer modeling is and how to effectively use that practice in the classroom.

Ensuring that all modalities of learning are being included in all lessons was brought up by two out of the four groups of people. By incorporating all modalities in every lesson through the use of UDL, every student will have success. This can be done by having students listen to a book using text-to-speech software, read versions of it written at lower readability levels, or read it in both English and their native language. Providing students with graphic organizers or having them create one to help organize their ideas. Every student has diverse learning styles and abilities, but finding ways to keep them challenged in meaningful ways while still relating to the state standards (Villa & Thousands, 2017). Another recommendation would be to make sure educators are trained in these strategies and know how to utilize them in the classroom. I think being able to see model teachers would better support this area.

Classroom Strategies for Inclusive Education

Creating an inclusive classroom climate is crucial for all students, where expectations are established, structures are put into place, a community is built, and positive reinforcement is given. Providing a positive environment will ensure all students are valued. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) shared those safe spaces are where relationships are being built, and trust is fostered. Parent 2 shared that it was important to make inclusion part of every child's world and

actually utilize inclusive practices in the classroom, not just call it an inclusion class. In addition, it was shared by two participants that the teacher's attitude and energy play a huge part in the classroom. Having a structured classroom but also making it fun for the kids.

Leadership Attributes for Inclusive Education

Without proper support from administrators, inclusive education is minimally effective (Alexander & Byrd 2020; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Faraclas, 2018). Participants in this study expressed the importance of having administrators advocate for inclusion. Administrators should be championing inclusive settings. When administrators are passionate about inclusion, more individuals will follow. Inclusive practices should be built within the school. In addition, participants believed that having supportive and inclusive leaders would ensure inclusivity. Administrators should be able to provide support for educators, families, students, and the community. District support would assist administrators in the ability to be advocates for inclusion through training and resources for administrators.

Next Steps for Educational Reform

The effectiveness of training, resources, instructional practices, classroom strategies, and administrative attributes correlate with positive inclusive environments. Inclusive education does not have a one size fits all approach, but there is an understanding of which practices lead to successful outcomes for all. This research study adds to the literature on specific best practices that would

support inclusive education. Examples of training, resources, instructional practices, and classroom strategies that support inclusive education are found in this study, which helps move theory into practice for school districts. Federal and local policies, funding streams, and regulations create an environment that supports successful outcomes (Fixsen et al., 2005).

The best practices discovered in this study provide insight into training, resources, instructional practices, classroom community, and leadership attributes to support inclusive education. However, these practices should not be limited to just educators. When it comes to inclusion, it's all about the team behind the child. It's teamwork between teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents. Just having that relationship with them and focusing on making learning accessible and fun for the child. As stated by Support Staff 2, "...you have a four-prong approach, which is the administrators, the teachers, the families, and then there's the community. Now, you built a web of support or inclusiveness in the school setting" (Personal Communication, March 5, 2023). This statement supports the need to provide support in a four-prong approach to promote student success in an inclusive environment. Training, resources, instructional practices, and strategies should be provided to educators, administrators, families, and the community to build a web of support.

An inclusive framework would provide clear guidelines for inclusive education. Frameworks should be explored to determine which framework has the most success with inclusive education. Along with the framework, policies

should be put into place that would state all schools should provide an environment in the general education setting for all students. Separate educational settings should not be a common practice for students. In society, individuals can work, shop, play, and eat together without being separated. Students must learn and grow with one another to prepare them for the real world.

In education, oftentimes individuals are focused on disabilities as opposed to abilities. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders are searching for the abilities first and then identifying their needs while strengthening their assets. Educational leaders should be cautious not to focus on labels and lead with a strength-based agenda. Leaders should be modeling the strength-based approach as opposed to more deficit or label of this particular disability. When those in leadership positions model inclusivity, others will follow.

Recommendations for Future Research

I have strong hope that this study contributed to current research and provided insight from multiple perspectives, but there is still more that could be done. Continued research on this topic will provide more best practices for inclusive education. The following are recommendations for further research:

1. Increase the number of participants in each group of individuals (teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents)

2. Examine best practices of middle school and high school inclusive education programs.

3. Focus on other southern California districts with diverse populations to explore broadened perspectives.

4. Identify whether a correlation exists between best practices and student assessment results of students with IEPs.

5. Research to continue the exploration of necessary components of inclusive education.

6. Examine the parental impact on academic success for inclusive education.

7. The study identified that there was limited knowledge about inclusive frameworks. It would be a recommendation to further explore the knowledge about frameworks and identify which frameworks are most effective with inclusive education.

8. The questions were written in a way to ensure all participants of various backgrounds, education, and knowledge were able to comprehend and respond to the questions. For future research, questions may be rewritten to provide in-depth responses.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are weaknesses in the study that may affect the outcomes and conclusion of the research. The responses collected through the interview protocol may significantly impact the implementation of inclusive education. There was potentially a chance of interview bias that may have occurred. Due to the participation in this study being voluntary, responses are dependent on each participant's willingness (Ross & Bibler, 2019). The population of sample size

was small and consisted of five teachers, five support staff, five administrators, and five parents, which limited the study. The study was limited to one school district in Southern California, which does not generalize to other school districts. Lastly, because the researcher used semi-structured questions in the interviews, that may be perceived as a limitation.

Conclusions

Villa (2022) defines inclusive education as "the vision and practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering, and supporting the diverse academic, social-emotional, communication, and language learning of all students in shared environments and experiences for the purpose of attaining the desired goals of education." This study was determined to explore the best practices that would promote inclusive education. Inclusive education has always been a controversial topic, where educators felt like they lacked sufficient training, administrators didn't understand what support was needed, support staff was often left out of discussions, and parents didn't know how inclusive education would benefit their children. However, the benefits of inclusive education impact not only the students but also the educators, administrators, and families. Some continuous barriers exist to supporting inclusive education. Although research has explored some best practices of inclusive education, a gap still exists when it comes to best practices among all stakeholders such as teachers, support staff, administrators, and families. Research has identified that inclusive education does positively impact student achievement; however, there is a demand for a

greater understanding of effective practices that will support an inclusive environment.

The theoretical framework was described and included three theories (a) Social Constructivist Theory (b) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (c) Bolman and Deal's Organizational Frames. Each theory supports inclusive education and was evidenced by literature. The three theories aligned with the results from this study and further supported prior research.

The results of the study produced nine best practices that inclusive schools should be utilizing. After analyzing the data, the following best practices were identified: (a) training on instructional practices, (b) training on special education, (c) training on inclusion, (d) training on models of inclusion, (e) planning time, (f) peer modeling as an instructional practice, (g) expectations, (h) administrators advocate for inclusion, and (i) supportive administrators. The study also identified the common perception of the benefits of inclusive education. Therefore, it was determined that with these best practices put into practice, student success was shown.

This study contributes to the field of inclusive education and will provide all stakeholders with practices that will support stakeholders and improve student success. The identified best practices will add to the literature on inclusive education implementation that will empower school leaders to provide adequate support and resources to stakeholders, which will ultimately reflect on learners with various needs. A truly inclusive classroom is walking into the class and not

knowing who is who, and the only way to do that is if all stakeholders are involved in every process.

"Any kind of difference is going to be evident, but it is important as an educator to be mindful, to be intentional in how you address all differences across the board. Not just disability, it could be a difference in religion that is expressed in a particular type of dress, a difference in ethnicity that is expressed in a difference of skin color. If you lead as a leader with that kind of mindset and know your audience, others will reflect that same perspective. So, it's being very intentional that those differences are really a beautiful thing. If we were all the same, that would be kind of boring" (Personal Communication, February 17, 2023).

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BASED ON PERCEPTIONS
OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS**

IRB Approval Number: IRB-FY2023-1

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate
perceived best practices of for inclusive education from the perception of various
stakeholders. This study is being conducted by Bianca Zubia under the
supervision of Dr. Carmen Beck, California State University, San Bernardino.
This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State
University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this dissertation is to identify which strategies and
factors are perceived to be the most successful in the implementation of inclusive
education. More specifically, identifying what stakeholders participating in the
study perceive to be the best educational leadership practices, identifying what
resources are needed and which professional development strategies are most
effective in regards to inclusive education. This study aims to add to the research
in the area of inclusive education. The findings from this dissertation research
can be utilized to address a gap in the literature, which doesn't address the
needs of a school site, specifically educational leadership practices, training, and
resources toward inclusive education. The participants in this study will provide
valuable insights as to what is needed to promote a successful inclusive school.

DESCRIPTION: I will conduct semi-structured, open-ended interviews with up to
20 participants to gain insight of perceived best practices for inclusive education.
I would like to acquire your perspectives about what is necessary for inclusive
education. After interviews have been conducted, I will provide each participant
the interview transcript to review for accuracy and meet with them to go over their
revisions.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not
have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not
answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.
Refusing to participate or withdrawing from participation in the middle of the
research will not affect your employment or relationship with the school site.
If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an interview (45 to 60 minutes) with the researcher, Bianca Zubia. You may select the location (your school, virtual format, other). The following interview and general questions will be asked:

- In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program?
  - Which training do you find most beneficial for an inclusive environment?
  - What resources do you feel are necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting?
  - Does your school site use a framework to promote inclusive education? What is it? Is it effective?
  - How much time do you feel is necessary to fully implement an inclusive classroom?
- Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?
  - What inclusive instructional practices are most effective on student outcomes?
  - What positive effects have you seen on student outcomes in the inclusive setting?
  - What classroom strategies help foster a positive inclusive environment?
  - What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers at your school site?
- Which leadership skills have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program?
  - What has leadership done to support an inclusive school?
  - What traits does your leader possess?
  - How do you think the leadership at the school site perceives students with disabilities?

2. Allow the interview to be recorded to be recorded using a recorder so that accurate transcription of the interview can occur.

3. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcription of you interview for accuracy, provide interpretation if necessary.

CONFIDENTIAL: For purposes of confidentiality, you will be provided a number, which will be used in the study (ex: Teacher 1). The audio recording of the interview will be password protected. The device will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home/office in Yucaipa, CA. When data collection is completed, the audio file will be destroyed. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with participants will remain password protected and will be disclosed only with permission of the participant or as required by law.

RISKS: The potential risk to the participants is minimal. Possible minimal risks include exposure to some personal information to the researcher, potential for your participation to be inferred through interaction with the researcher, and the possibility of the interview question will bring up something that may involve negative or emotional reactions. In order to protect the research participants, information will be confidential. No identifiable names, schools, or districts will be reported in the study. Participants will be reminded to not state students' names or personal details during the interview discussion, as they run the risk of violating their students' privacy. Participants will also be reminded to speak about general issues rather than particular ones that could potentially identify an individual. I understand the possible risk to individuals if personal identifiable information is used; therefore, a number will be used to identify the participants (ex: Teacher 1).

BENEFITS: Participants may be prompted to reflect on their perception of effective inclusive education as a result of their participation, which in turn, provides them with the opportunity for growth. Additionally, this study will contribute to the knowledge and literature regarding best practices for inclusive settings.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH:
Please Initial the Following:
_____ I understand this research will be Video Recorded (If virtual format is chosen.)
_____ I understand that this research will be Audio Recorded

CONTACT: If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Carmen Beck or Bianca Zubia

RESULTS: Research results will be reported in the final dissertation, which will be published. Results will also be presented at the researcher's final defense.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:
_____ I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-1
Title: BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BASED ON PERCEPTIONS OF VARIOUS
STAKEHOLDERS
Creation Date: 7-5-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Carmen Beck
Review Board: CSUSB Main IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved
Submission Type	Modification	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

				Contact
Member	Bianca Zubia	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	
Member	Carmen Beck	Role	Principal Investigator	
Member	Carmen Beck	Role	Primary Contact	

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. In your experience, which resources or training have the greatest impact on an effective inclusive program?

    1. Which training do you find most beneficial for an inclusive environment?

    2. What resources do you feel are necessary to facilitate an inclusive setting?

    3. Does your school site use a framework to promote inclusive education? What is it? Is it effective?

    4. How much time do you feel is necessary to fully implement an inclusive classroom?

2. Which instructional practices do you think have the biggest effect on positive student outcomes in inclusive programs?

    a. What inclusive instructional practices are most effective on student outcomes?

    b. What positive effects have you seen on student outcomes in the inclusive setting?

    c. What classroom strategies help foster a positive inclusive environment?

    d. What opportunities do you have to collaborate with other teachers at your school site?

3. Which leadership skills have the biggest impact on positive student outcomes for an inclusive school program?

    e. What has leadership done to support an inclusive school?

    f. What traits does your leader possess?

    g. How do you think the leadership at the school site perceives students with disabilities?

APPENDIX D

CERTIFICATE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

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