A Case Study To Identify How Shared Decision Making and Collaboration between General and Exceptional Education Teachers Impact Effective and Ineffective Inclusion Practices

Faith Renee Strong

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A case study to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices

By

Faith Renee Strong

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Mississippi State, Mississippi

August 2018
A case study to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices

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Sergiovanni (1994) believed that the rationale for shared decision making is that those who are closest to students are best equipped to make educational decisions to improve instructional programs. Liontos (1994) believed that change is most likely to be effective and lasting when those who implement it feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process. Building level administrators along with general and exceptional education teachers play a vital role in making educational practices a reality in schools (Kilgore, 2011). The administrator must have adequate knowledge of what the practices entail and how to mobilize staff so these educational practices are implemented effectively.

In order to embrace the philosophy of inclusion, teachers must eliminate the focus on labels of students and make students with disabilities and support needs the determining factors in the provision of services and placement settings. This requires the school staff to shift paradigms when determining how best to meet the needs of students
with disabilities. The overall purpose of this study was to determine whether or not general and exceptional education teachers working together had an impact on the inclusion process. These two groups of teachers collaborated to address challenges that students meet in the general educational setting. Their goal was to provide the best possible learning experience for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. While this study only took into account the challenges and successes of one school, in one school district, it is a glimpse of what other teachers, general and exceptional education are facing in inclusive settings.

Results of the study showed that collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers clearly resulted in greater teacher efficacy. These teachers believed that they could make a positive difference. Teachers who exhibited this confidence were more likely to engage in collaboration. Some of the general education teachers who had the strongest desire for collaboration and worked closely with an exceptional education teacher exhibited a number of positive traits that led to more effective inclusion instruction. With this in mind, it is important for educational leaders to do all that they can to provide professional training and development to offer ideas and instances of collaboration to help the students with disabilities and teachers involved in educating them.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my former advisor and major professor, the late Dr. Rufus Dwight Hare. His unwavering support and encouragement over the years enhanced my professional growth and motivated me to stay focused on my goal. I am grateful for the time and energy he spent helping me. He had a great sense of humor which was greatly needed to endure this process. I will cherish all of the memories of him. You are truly missed and I dedicate my accomplishment of this degree to you.

The memory of a good person is a blessing. Proverbs 10:7.
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The completion of my dissertation was a very challenging process. There were times when I wanted to give up because of several obstacles in my way, but several people supported and encouraged me along the way. I am so grateful for the relationships that we have formed as a result of this process. I would like to extend a hearty thanks to those who supported me throughout the completion of this research study.

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To my other family members, friends and dedicated staff who have continued to support me on this long road and given me a little push of inspiration when I needed it, I sincerely thank you for your prayers and encouraging words. Most importantly, I give praises and honor to God for giving me the mental strength to endure and complete this endeavor.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
Individualized Education Program (IEP)
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)
Professional Learning Community (PLC)
United States Department of Education (USDE)
United States Office of Special Education (USOSE)
CHAPTER I
THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Shared decision making is a style of leadership that affords ownership, provides
empowerment, and allows individuals to be part of a team that can make a difference
(Chapman & Kuhns, 2006). Sergiovanni (1994) believed that the rationale for shared
decision making is that those who are closest to students are best equipped to make
educational decisions to improve instructional programs. Meadows and Saltzman (2002)
recommended that for shared leadership to be successful, a building level administrator
must make sure that teachers have the appropriate skills and opportunities to practice
them. Liontos (1994) believed that change is most likely to be effective and lasting when
those who implement it feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.
Therefore, it is important to identify how shared decision making between general and
exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices.

According to Kilgore (2011), building level administrators along with general and
exceptional education teachers play a vital role in making educational practices a reality
in schools. The administrator must have adequate knowledge of what the practices entail
and how to mobilize staff so these educational practices are implemented effectively.
Building collaborative relationships among staff may be challenging and requires
leadership support, clarification of roles and responsibilities, and ongoing planning. In order to embrace the philosophy of inclusion, teachers must eliminate the focus on labels of students and make students with disabilities and support needs the determining factors in the provision of services and placement settings. This requires the school staff to shift paradigms when determining how best to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The United States Office of Special Education (USOSE, 2000) discussed inclusion as it relates to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and specified that IDEA rules mean all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, should be in a general education classroom to the maximum extent possible. While all services must be appropriate for students in the general education classroom, there is debate about inclusion in the general educational setting. As a result, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, ensuring equal access and equal treatment for people with disabilities. Since then, the EHA has been reauthorized and renamed numerous times. The current version, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, together with the ADA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and other legislation, aim to ensure that the concepts of access and appropriateness are interpreted and applied consistently (Boroson, 2017). The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general educational setting has been a concern for parents, teachers and building level administrators (Shade & Stewart, 2001). Inclusion has become a process that is receiving increased attention throughout the nation and has caused building level administrators and teachers to fully embrace the concept as it relates to their professional responsibilities.
According to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2003), inclusion is generally recognized by educators to mean the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with age and grade-appropriate peers. Inclusion means that no child is excluded on the basis of type and degree of disability. Schools are accountable for promoting a cooperative and collaborative teaching environment. Consequently, there should be building-based planning, problem solving and ownership of all students. Turner (2003) noted inclusion does not suggest dumping students with disabilities in the general education classrooms without careful planning and adequate support, nor reducing services or funding for exceptional education. Under IDEA, students with disabilities (SWD) receive individualized plans of instruction (IEPs), which include parental participation during the inclusion process when decisions are made about how students who have special needs will be educated in general educational classroom settings (Grenier, 2010).

Inclusion should not be classified as teachers spending disproportionate amount of time teaching or adapting curriculum for students with disabilities, putting all students with disabilities in one general education classroom, or isolating students with disabilities socially, physically or academically within the general education classroom. Inclusion should not jeopardize the achievement of general education students through slower instruction or a less-challenging curriculum (USOSE, 2000). Exceptional education teachers are placed in the role of assisting and should focus on more specific instruction of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

As pointed out by Kauffman and Hallahan (2000), successful inclusion is promoted through the IEP process and is developed according to the individual student’s
needs. Instruction that addresses the IEP objectives and provisions of related services must continue in the general education setting to the maximum extent appropriate. Inclusion does not occur by simply moving a student to the general education setting. It is not a trade-off of supports and services, nor is it a trading-off of achievement of individual goals. Inclusion should be a practice that promotes a successful learning environment for students with disabilities.

**Background of Study**

Education for students with disabilities has changed over the years. Prior to the 1970s, students with disabilities often did not have equal educational opportunities with their peers without disabilities. According to IDEA (1997), some students with disabilities were not even educated in public schools, while others who participated were often limited in their educational experiences because their disabilities went undetected. Olson (2003) indicated the evolution of laws leading up to IDEA of 1997 resulted in schools that are mandated to provide students with disabilities equal educational opportunities.

Some of the purposes of IDEA (1997) are to ensure that all eligible students with disabilities are given exceptional education and related services to meet their specific needs and to prepare them for employment and independent living. Another purpose of IDEA is to guarantee that educators have available the support necessary to increase the chances of success of students with disabilities. One provision of IDEA is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE); to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children without disabilities. According to IDEA (1997), only when education in the general education classroom cannot be achieved (assuming
the uses of supplementary and supportive services have been exhausted) can the school change placement into a more restricted environment.

Changes with IDEA regarding instructional formats have caused role confusion for exceptional and general education teachers. This confusion can lead to an uncertainty of responsibilities in the co-teaching setting and can ultimately be a factor in teachers’ feelings of low self-efficacy (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010). Role confusion, which typically involves a general and exceptional education teacher without guidelines for how their relationship is to be developed, stems from co-teaching structures. In an ideal setting, both teachers teach the students as an educational team. In reality, in the inclusion classroom, the general education teacher presents lessons while the exceptional education teacher assists. This skewed interpretation of teachers’ roles causes difficulty and makes both teachers experience frustration with not meeting the student’s educational requirements. It also confuses feelings of each teacher about the responsibilities in the inclusion classroom.

Arends (2000) stated that the practice of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms is called inclusion. The implementation of inclusion in schools, however, goes beyond the simple physical placement of students with disabilities into the classroom to include the extent to which the students are participating in classroom activities and assignments. According to Kochhar, West, and Taymans (2000), inclusion refers to students with disabilities learning in the same classroom as their peers without disabilities even though their educational goals may be different. In addition to learning along with their peers without disabilities, inclusion also means that
school classes and activities are scheduled for students with disabilities so that opportunities for their participation are maximized.

A multitude of factors facilitate successful inclusion. It is the responsibility of the building level administrator and teachers to meet personal, social, and academic needs for all students while they are in school (Kochhar et al., 2000). Inclusion can give students more knowledge about others’ differences as they learn to interact together in the classroom. Kochhar et al. (2000) found it is important for the building level administrator to provide planning, support, and services for the staff to help ensure successful inclusion practices for all students with disabilities.

Exceptional education regulations established at the local, state, and federal levels have been a challenge for many educators. Strict legal requirements have affected the way students with disabilities receive their education. Bruskewitz (1998) found some 20 years ago that the movement to include more students with exceptional needs within general education classes had caused some educators to question their ability to effectively serve students with various disabilities. Bolick (2001) and Hehir (2003) have argued that the inclusion of students with disabilities in a general education classroom consumes too much time from the workday of an already overworked teacher and reduces the actual time on task for all the students. Another argument against inclusion is the belief that curriculum standards must be lowered to accommodate students with learning disabilities (Bolick, 2001). Teachers are required to follow the practice of inclusion legally. Therefore, teachers seek support from building level administrators to provide feedback or offer professional development in order to increase the chances of success.
Crockett and Kauffman (1998) noted that despite efforts toward inclusion, various problems existed with implementation including a lack of training for teachers and a lack of administrative support. Fullan and Miles (1992) suggested that collaborative time for teachers to undertake and sustain school improvement may be more important than equipment or facilities or staff development. The problems of inclusion are not new. Graden and Bauer (1991), over 20 years ago, found inclusion cannot be successful without collaboration since inclusion is predicated on professionals working together for the purpose of improving the education of students in the school. Collaborative problem solving is central to the success of inclusion schools and provides the support by which interventions, adaptations, and accommodations are implemented in inclusion classrooms (Graden & Bauer, 1991). Various researchers identified that general and exceptional education teachers along with the building administrator should participate in inclusion practices such as: organizational structure, professional learning communities, collaboration, and the approaches of co-teaching in order to identify how shared decision making works best among them.

Building administrators have always been integral to high quality exceptional education programs in schools, but never more so than in today’s climate of high standards and high stakes accountability. Building administrators need to have deep knowledge about exceptional education and the students who receive these services (McLaughlin, 2009). Until recently it was possible for building administrators to delegate responsibility for exceptional education to an exceptional education teacher, but now they must be involved with the education of any student because everyone is accountable for improving the achievement of all students. The demands to improve the educational
outcomes for these students are greater than ever. McLaughlin (2009) believes that building administrators must know how to meaningfully include all students with disabilities in standards, assessments, and accountability requirements. In addition, they can make a difference in how students with disabilities and their families feel about school as well as what they learn.

Schools in the United States are currently accountable for both improving achievement outcomes for all students and educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms (IDEA, 2004). These demands are sometimes competing because they put pressure on schools to be both equitable and excellent and to meet the needs of all students (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Evidence indicates that many schools have made progress toward including students with disabilities in general education classrooms for much of the school day. On the other hand, few schools have been successful in attaining high achievement outcomes for all students in highly inclusive settings. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) state that if schools are to become both inclusive and effective for all students then significant changes in school structure and practice must occur.

Broadly defined, professional learning communities refer to professionals in a school, typically groups of teachers, who work collaboratively to improve practice and enhance student learning (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001; Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996). According to Dufour (2004), a professional learning community (PLC) is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups. In an
educational setting, a PLC may contain people from multiple levels of the organization who are collaboratively and continually working together for the betterment of the organization. The major principle of PLCs is that people learn more together than if they were on their own. Professional learning communities are recommended as a way to support teachers in collaborating effectively in order to provide all students with the best possible learning environment. The idea of team learning is an interesting concept that teachers work to promote in their classrooms. When teams learn together, there are beneficial results for the organization (Senge, 2000). Studies show that changes in the culture and climate of a school change when teachers participate in PLCs. Professional development training opportunities were influential in helping educators modify their philosophy of exceptional education to focus on a student needs-based approach rather than focus on the disability of the student (Wang & Reynolds, 1996). Through this commitment and creation of shared decisions, the team may become empowered to work together and achieve goals.

Reported benefits of teacher collaboration for teachers include sharing of classroom roles and responsibilities, sharing ideas and skills with another professional on a daily basis, and reduction in the amount of time teachers were isolated in the school environment. Inclusive classrooms staffed with a general education teacher and an exceptional education teacher whose philosophy of education and teaching style were similar and where there was agreement on teaching roles and responsibilities were reported to be the most successful collaborative relationships (Amerman & Fleres, 2003). Collaboration efforts such as co-planning and co-teaching opportunities for teachers provided the structure teachers needed to address the diverse needs of all the students
included in general education classrooms (Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, & Reeves, 1999). Teachers who supported collaboration as a part of their daily work helped foster student learning by teaming with other professionals to design appropriate education programs for students (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). Collaboration is a key feature of schools, and there is solid evidence that collaboration results in better outcomes for students with disabilities (McLaughlin, 2004).

By creating a co-teaching team of an exceptional education teacher and a general education teacher, the potential exists for the teachers to develop a classroom learning community that contains a natural support system for all students to feel a sense of belonging (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). A supportive classroom setting creates the conditions for all students to be successful. Given the emphasis in federal and state law on the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, it is important to understand how general and exceptional education teachers and the building level administrator can be included in shared decision making with regard to the inclusion process. If they support the required changes and are an active part of the planning process, then inclusion practices may be fully implemented and successful.

**Statement of Purpose**

As the inclusion movement continues to grow, more students with disabilities are educated within the general education classroom. General and exceptional education teachers are involved in responding to numerous challenges that are presented by students identified as requiring exceptional education services. Since the implementation strategies for inclusion vary and several interpretations of how inclusion should work exist, the purpose of this study is to identify how shared decision making and
collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices in one school.

**Research Questions**

It is important to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. Seeking to describe an example of this relationship, the following research questions were developed:

1. How does shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective inclusion practices?
2. How does a lack of shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers lead to ineffective inclusion practices and challenges?

**Definition of Terms**

The following legal and educational definitions are applicable to the terms that have been used in this study:

Building Level Administrator refers to those individuals who hold state certification or licensure in the field of educational leadership (Standards for School Leaders, 1996).

Collaboration is working with others to do a task and to achieve shared goals (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Co-Teaching is a model of classroom instruction in which exceptional and general education teachers share instructional responsibilities within the same classroom (Friend & Cook, 2007).
Differentiation Instruction allows students to have options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn (Tomlinson, 1999).

Effective Practices refers to collecting inputs which can fuel the school processes and lead to school success (Gaziel, 1996). Some examples include: team planning with the teachers, providing professional development, and discussing the inclusion process with parents.

Exceptional Education refers to exceptionally designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with disabilities (McLaughlin, 2009).

Exceptional Education Teacher is a person who works with students having a wide range of disabilities and is employed primarily by public and private school systems. Exceptional education teachers provide and instruct in regular academic subjects, while adjusting the curriculum to meet students’ individual needs (McLaughlin, 2009).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) mandates that school districts provide access to general education and specialized educational services. It also requires that children with disabilities receive support free of charge as is provided to non-disabled students (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

General Education Setting is a set of educational experiences which a child would receive in a school or school district where that child to enter school at kindergarten and proceed through school without being labeled handicapped or in need of special services (Lilly, 1998).

General Education Teacher is a person who provides education for students. The role of the teacher is carried out at a school or another place of education (Lilly, 1998).
Inclusion is the process of integrating students with disabilities into regular schools and classes, not only physically, but also allowing them to learn utilizing the general education curriculum (Crockett & Kauffman, 1998).

Inclusion Setting defined as the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (McLaughlin, 2009).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) refers to a written document required by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (PL 94-142) for every child with a disability; includes statements of present performance, annual goals, short term instructional objectives, specific educational services needed, relevant dates, general education program participation, and evaluation procedures; must be signed by parents as well as education personnel (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the updated federal law that mandates that children with disabilities be educated in a public school setting that adequately addresses their learning needs, or that includes students without disabilities, if possible (IDEA, 2004).

Ineffective Practices refers to inputs which can inhibit the school processes and deter school success. Some examples include lack of funding, lowered students’ self-esteem, and an increased overload of work on the general education teacher (Lyon & Vaughn, 1999).

Learning Disabilities refers to a disorder found in children of normal intelligence who have difficulties in learning specific skills (Lerner, 2000).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) refers to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care
facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, exceptional classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

Organizational Structure refers to how information flows from level to level within the company. Decisions flow from the top down, and policies are designed to provide a structure where various work roles and responsibilities are delegated, controlled and coordinated (McLaughlin, 2009).

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups. Special education teachers may become central participants in teacher communities as a result of involvement in PLCs. When teachers collaborate, especially in inclusive settings, students’ school performance improves (Senge, 2000).

Shared decision making is a process that provides an opportunity for members of a school community to collaborate in solving problems, defining a course of action, and shaping direction for the individual school (Meadows & Saltzman, 2002).

**Theoretical Framework**

Shared decisions between the general and exceptional education teachers create an environment for students with disabilities to be successful. These beliefs align with those of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). When the study is couched in theory, lessons learned from the case study are likely to advance the knowledge based on a given topic.
Bandura (1977) developed the SCT which describes the interrelationships between behavior, environmental factors, personal factors and their influences and actions. According to SCT, the learner acquires knowledge as his or her environment converges with personal characteristics and personal experience. New experiences are evaluated in comparison with the past and prior experiences and help to subsequently guide and inform the learner as to how the present should be investigated. This study identified how shared decision making between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices.

SCT provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior (Bandura, 1977; 1986). This study obtained information pertaining to shared decision making and collaboration applied at one school with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the SCT model, the interaction between the person and behavior involves the influences of a person’s thoughts and actions. The interaction between the person and the environment involves human beliefs and cognitive competencies that are developed and modified by social influences and structures within the environment.

Consistent with a constructionist epistemology, social cognitive theory posits people are not driven by inner forces or shaped by external stimuli alone. Rather, it is the interaction between the world and the person interpreting it that shapes behavior and cognition. SCT as applied to schools supports that shared decisions and collaboration can be an effective educational practice to meet specific needs of students with disabilities. The decisions made between a general and exceptional education teacher who possess different educational expertise sets the stage for an educational classroom that meets the
specific needs of students with disabilities. The general education teacher has expertise in curricular content concepts, and the exceptional education teacher has specific training analyzing student needs and locating materials to support accommodations, modifications, and different instructional strategies.

These beliefs align with those of a social constructionist epistemology. According to Crotty (1998), the social constructionist believes that the way in which an individual perceives knowledge is socially constructed. The structure of the public school system as a work environment for teachers is socially constructed. When looking through a social constructionist lens, educators are human beings who engage with their world and try to make sense of it (Crotty, 1998). Every educator constructs meaning from information shared in an educational setting and is affected by the culture of the environment (Schein, 2004).

To understand the theoretical perspective of this study, it is necessary to address Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory which served as the framework for understanding and interpreting information obtained from this study. His theory has a dual relevance and application to this research: (a) its relationship to students with disabilities and (b) how teachers learn from each other. Vygotsky’s social, cultural, and developmental paradigm for exceptional education in particular has the potential to unify, restructure, and promote exceptional and remedial education as a science, profession, and social institution (Gindis, 1999).

Vygotsky focused his theory primarily on children with disabilities. He believed that changing negative societal attitudes toward students with disabilities should be one of the goals of exceptional education (Vygotsky, 1978). He considered learning as a
shared process in a responsive social context. He believed that social and cultural
development did not occur in isolation and further added connecting links between
sociocultural processes taking place in society.

**Overview of Methodology**

The research design appropriate for this topic was exploratory case study.

According to Easterbrook (2001), the exploratory case study is ideal for analyzing what is
common and/or different across cases that share some key criteria and is appropriate for
preliminary studies in which it is not yet clear which phenomena are important, or how to
measure these phenomena. Case studies involve direct engagement with the participants
to obtain an in-depth description and interpretation of behavior within a culture or social
group (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). Case studies allow the reader an opportunity to gain
insight of the various circumstances that may increase the option of transferability to his
or her own situation. Information was gathered by the researcher through informal
observations, formal interviews and a review of written documents utilized during
common planning time with the general and exceptional education teachers since these
teachers can best identify how shared decision making and collaboration impacts
effective and ineffective inclusion practices within the general education classroom in
this setting.

**Delimitations of the Study**

This case study was limited to the general and exceptional education teachers
employed in a rural, southern elementary school. The study was meant to identify how
one school planned and implemented inclusion practices. Since every school has its own
culture and set of student needs, no attempt was made at developing generalizations. This
study was designed to share insights and lessons learned about the implementation of the inclusion practices that may or may not be transferable to other settings. The findings of this study were limited to the educators working in this inclusion setting.

**Significance of the Study**

Long (1995) noted over 20 years ago that inclusion needs to be a grassroots movement with input and support from general education teachers if it is to have a chance to succeed. He reported when inclusion was a top-down decision, many general education teachers struggled with the additional pressure of creating an environment of inclusion. Snyder (1999) found that the inclusion movement had primarily been an exceptional education movement, and very few general education teachers have been involved even though they either are or will be an extremely affected group. General education teachers have not been included in shared decision making and collaboration with regard to the inclusion process.

If general education teachers do not support the required changes and are not an active part of the planning process, then educational practices may not become fully implemented. Snyder (1999) noted general education teachers are to be involved in every phase of the planning and implementation process. If the general education teachers are not involved, they are more likely to feel forced or coerced into creating an inclusion classroom rather than being an active participant in the process. It is important that the concerns of the general education teachers be addressed so the seeds of doubt, fear, and mistrust do not grow into a poor educational experience for all of the students involved.
Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter provides a background overview of the proposed study, establishes the statement of purpose of the study, identified the research questions and outlines the definition of key terms. The second chapter details the comprehensive review of literature relevant to the study. The reader is also provided with a summary of research on inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classroom, and the shared decisions and collaboration that impacted effective and ineffective inclusion practices. The third chapter includes the elements of research design and methodology descriptions, identification of participants, and described data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter includes a summary of the findings. Finally, the fifth chapter provides conclusions and implications for policy and practice.
The focus of the review of related literature is to discuss research on how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. Arriving at a definition for inclusion that is acceptable for all concerned has presented both controversy and compromise. Crockett and Kauffman (1998) explained inclusion as a term that most describes the placement of a student, regardless of the level of his or her disability. A similar definition was proposed by Wang (1994) when she described inclusion as bringing children who are disabled out of their exceptional classes and strengthening general school programs. Villa and Thousand (2003) described inclusion as the principle and practice of considering general education as the placement of first choice for all learners.

**History of Inclusion and Inclusion Research**

Inclusion has become a complex issue in education. The provision of educational opportunity and physical admittance can be legislated, but acceptance cannot. How principals view the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in their neighborhood schools and in general education classroom is important to understand. Prior to 1958, there was little or no research that focused on the principals’ view of students with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities began organizing in the 1950s and 1960s to campaign for changes in the educational services being provided for their children.
Scholars and educators have offered a number of definitions of inclusion with the intent of informing teachers’ educational practices. Creasy and Walther-Thomas (1996) offered another definition that inclusion is an educational philosophy and instructional practice premised on the belief that students with disabilities learn best when they are educated with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms. To Skrtic, Sailor, and Gee (1996), “Inclusive education provides the place and the catalyst through which general and exceptional educators…can come together to create quality, democratic schools…Inclusion signifies much more than the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities into general education classrooms” (p. 142, 157). Moore, Gilbreath, and Maiuri (1998) expand on these definitions to include “all students in a school’s attendance area are full members of that school community and each student participates equitably in the opportunities and responsibilities of the general education environment” (p. 1). Once inclusion was defined and accepted by scholars and educators, emphasis switched to how to educate students with disabilities within inclusive settings and thus became the issue faced by members of the educational community. For example, Friend and Cook (2007) broadly defined inclusion as a belief system that creates a foundation for how students are educated.

How to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms is a topic that scholars and educators continue to research, monitor, and debate. When PL 94-142 (EHA) was passed in 1975, the law provided for the education of students with disabilities, and included (a) “to the maximum extent possible, handicapped children are educated with children who are not handicapped”, and (b) “removal of handicapped children from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or
severity of the handicap is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), 1975; McNulty et al., 1996). Differentiating instruction for students is no easy task. It is the responsibility of the teacher to meet students’ needs by adjusting the curriculum and instruction. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2009) noted

Differentiation is an approach to curriculum and instruction that systematically takes student differences into account in designing opportunities for each student to engage with information and ideas and to develop essential skill. Differentiation provides a framework for responding to differences in students’ current and developing levels of readiness, their learning profiles, and their interests to optimize the match between students and learning opportunities. These three dimensions of student difference can be addressed through adjustments to the content, process, products, and environments of student-learning, and each is justified by a research-based rationale. (p. 599)

When differentiating instruction, teachers are careful to take into account students’ diverse backgrounds, current level of knowledge, readiness, language, preferences and learning interests. After accessing these factors, the teacher must then plan effectively to develop activities suitable for meeting students at their learning level and moving them to where they need to be. When it is determined that a student is experiencing difficulties performing on grade level in a general education setting, teachers may begin a process called response to intervention. According to Response to
Intervention RTI, Action Network (2012) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs.

The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Struggling learners are provided with interventions at increasing levels of intensity to accelerate their rate of learning. These services may be provided by a variety of personnel, including general education teachers, special education teachers, administrator and specialists. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and level of performance of individual students. RTI is designed for use when making decisions in both general and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by child outcome data.

As EAHCA was reauthorized by the U.S. Congress through the years and in 1990 became IDEA, increasing emphasis to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms became a national trend and different service delivery models proliferated in schools with varying reports of success (Walther-Thomas, 1997). In their study, Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that even through exceptional education teachers felt internal and external pressures to include students in general education classes, they took a position to support inclusive practices and assume a co-teaching role with general education teachers. This support for inclusion helped teachers create educational programs in general education classrooms for students with disabilities and meet the intent of IDEA ’97 guidelines of FAPE and LRE (Heiman, 2001; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997; Patterson, 2005; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2000). Patterson (2005) goes on to say, “IDEA ’97 clearly defines educators’ roles and responsibilities with regard to children with
disabilities, including teachers in both exceptional education and inclusive general education settings” (p. 67).

Like any new innovation or program, the effective inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms does not happen immediately after the decision is made to move in that direction (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996). According to McLeskey and Waldron (2002), inclusion of exceptional education students in general classrooms works best when (a) effective leadership is provided from the district and building level that supports teachers’ efforts, (b) when professional development is provided for teachers, and (c) when time is provided for exceptional education and general education teachers to collaboratively plan.

Since the regulations in IDEA 1997 required a total reversal of established practices for students with disabilities in public schools from self-contained or pull-out models to a more inclusive model (Creasy & Walther-Thomas, 1996), inclusion service delivery models and their variants have been practiced in U.S. schools (Kim et al., 2006). Because the federal mandate was left to each state and local school district to interpret and plan its implementation, inclusive practices in schools were wide-ranging. For some schools (due to a lack of state, district, and building leadership), interpretation of how to implement this top-down mandate was left to individual teachers (Patterson & Marshall, 2001). However, for inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms to be successful, teachers need sufficient level of support (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Teachers valued school leaders who supported their inclusion service delivery models in schools (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).
District-level and building-level planning were also identified as key factors for inclusive education programs to become successfully integrated in the school environment (McNulty et al., 1996; Walther-Thomas, Bryant & Land, 1996). Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2002) spoke to the importance of planning when considering inclusive educational programs for students, “If we do not take time to plan, we cannot plan to have successful inclusion” (p. 247). Researchers have further reported that professional development and training opportunities are important supports for successful inclusion of students with exceptional needs in general education classrooms (Friend, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; McNulty, 1996; Wang & Reynolds, 1996; Zigmond, 2001). Ideally districts would provide staff development opportunities for professionals who co-teach for ongoing skill development and support plus assure that adequate resources for teachers in inclusive classrooms are available (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). McLeskey and Waldron (2002) indicated in their study that teachers who enter the realm of inclusive education need training on implementation strategies through professional development opportunities. In her writings, Friend (2007) also stressed the importance of teachers having professional development to learn strategies to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

The Inclusion Setting

Daane, Beirne-Smith, and Latham (2001) revealed that inclusion requires collaboration between the general and exceptional education teachers. It also argued that researchers should analyze classroom teachers’ and school leaders’ perceptions about the students with disabilities in the general education setting. School leaders and teachers were responsible for inclusion in the school, and it was important that their perceptions
be recognized according to the policies. In the study, the perception of the school leaders and teachers toward the practice of inclusive education was investigated through a questionnaire survey and individual interviews. The findings of the study indicated that the perceptions of the groups studied were mixed. They agreed that general and exceptional education teachers were cooperatively planning IEPs and using co-teaching in the general education classroom. However, they also believed that general and exceptional education teachers did not have a level of comfort when collaborating with each other.

The three groups disagreed that students with disabilities could possibly receive more effective instruction in the inclusive classroom. The groups recognized that the presence of students with disabilities in the inclusive setting increased the instructional load of the general education teachers. Not only were the instructional methods much greater, but the teachers also indicated that there were more issues with management of students with disabilities placed in the general education classroom. In these instances, school leaders disagreed. All groups agreed that general education teachers were not prepared to meet the instructional needs of the students with disabilities in their classes. The groups also agreed that students with disabilities achieve less academic success in the general education classroom (Daane et al., 2001).

More qualitative research has been conducted to examine the perceptions and attitudes of all educators toward the practice of inclusion (Ritter, Michael, & Irby, 1999). Teacher understanding about the purposes of their time, space and instruction should be explored to help them with the transition and changes to implement inclusion. In another ethnographic study, the perceptions of fifth and sixth grade students with learning
disabilities who were participating in an inclusion exceptional education program were addressed (Ritter et al., 1999). The study also examined the perspectives of parents and general education teachers to help gain understanding of inclusive practices in the general education setting. The analysis of data revealed five areas of concern: (a) increased self-confidence, (b) camaraderie, (c) support of the teachers, (d) poor self-esteem in the exceptional education classes, and (e) high expectations. A study by Daane et al. (2001) focused on effective inclusion practices and policies implemented at the school level. This process was implemented by school leaders, teachers and parents who worked together to ensure successful programming in the schools. School leaders should show serious interest in creating a structure for implementing inclusive practices, which teachers perceive as supporting their efforts and interest for students with disabilities. School leaders’ enthusiasm empowers the teachers and give them confidence to address the challenges of inclusion. Daane et al. (2001) also provided sufficient resources for hiring support staff and professional development on inclusion. In addition to the parents’ role, it is more important for educators to explore instructional models than to explore more traditional education models. Parents should be involved as members and share responsibility for different activities. This study suggests that further research could be explored to investigate the perspectives of the exceptional education teacher, lead inclusion teacher and school leaders about the full inclusion of programming (Daane et al., 2001).

**Practices in the Inclusion Setting**

Shade and Stewart (2001) asserted that one of the main factors influencing the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is the positive attitudes of teachers.
Teachers’ acceptance of the policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it (Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006). Hipp and Huffman (2000) stated, for such whole school reform, school leadership is seen as a key factor to success. McLaughlin (2009) identified some principles that every school leader needs to know about exceptional education. First, school leaders must understand that effective exceptional education is truly individualized and should match instruction to the learning characteristics of students with disabilities. Next, they must understand that exceptional education is neither a place nor program, but a set of services and supports tailored to the needs of individual students so that they can progress in the general education classrooms. Finally, school leaders need to know how to create the conditions within their schools that support effective exceptional education practices. Therefore, to ensure the success of inclusion, school leaders must display behaviors and attitudes that promote the acceptance and success of students with disabilities in general education classes (Praisner, 2003).

Researchers agreed that successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the general educational setting is a positive change (Praisner, 2003). General education teachers must be more accepting of students with exceptional needs and including them in the general education setting. Talmor, Reiter, and Feigin (2005) found another necessary condition for the successful implementation of inclusion is continuous support and assistance to teachers by others such as the school leader, the counselor, exceptional education teachers, paraprofessionals (teacher assistants), and the school psychologist.

Research by Campbell and Gilmore (2003) found that teachers with positive views of inclusion had more confidence in their ability to support students in inclusive
setting, and they successfully adapted classroom materials and procedures to accommodate their needs. Idol (2006) found that teachers’ negative attitudes toward a student’s disability led to low expectations for a person with a disability, and this could lead to reduced learning opportunities for students, continuing the cycle of impaired performance and lower expectations by both the teacher and the student.

General education teachers sometimes have negative attitudes about students in the inclusion setting because they feel that students with disabilities do not have the skills and intellectual ability to obtain knowledge that is taught (Idol, 2006). Some general education teachers also believe that many students with disabilities, because of their low reading levels, cause a great deal of disciplinary and social issues in the classroom. A number of general education teachers who instruct students with disabilities also have problems planning their time, accommodating and/or modifying instruction in the classroom (Idol, 2006).

Some teachers also believe that their workload is too heavy, due to having to contact parents of inclusion students more often than other students (Idol, 2006). General education teachers experienced higher rates of burn out than those who had not worked with students with exceptional needs (Talmor et al., 2005). General education teachers were also apprehensive about the quality of work produced by children with exceptional needs. Lack of adequate support services and teachers’ concerns about deficiencies in their own training and preparation in the skills required to support inclusive educational practices added additional stress to general education teachers (Campbell & Gilmore, 2003). When teachers were asked specifically about their willingness to include students with particular disabilities in their classroom, they were only willing to accept the
inclusion of students with mild disabilities. They were reluctant to include students with more severe physical disabilities or students with intellectual disabilities (Campbell & Gilmore, 2003).

General education teachers all had different attitudes about the practice of inclusion in their schools (Campbell & Gilmore, 2003), but they liked having an assistant in the classroom. They valued the presence of the exceptional education teacher and speech pathologist. They were proud of the program and felt like the students with disabilities’ presence in the classroom did not affect statewide performance. General education teachers felt like more professional development, opportunities to see inclusion practices in the school as well as support from the school leader were needed. The results of the study showed that teachers’ attitudes toward the practices of inclusion have improved. Further qualitative research should be continued to help school leaders and teachers identify ways to make inclusion smoother for students and teachers.

**Roles of the Administrator in Shared Decision Making**

The most significant changes in the role of the principal have occurred over the past two decades in the context of school restructuring. In a study of 50 chief state school officers, Flanigan, Richardson, and Marion (1991) stated that “there is little doubt that the education reform movement has been a prevalent part of the changing role of school administrators and principals and will likely continue to be a fact of life” (p.18). The importance of the role of the principal as change agent and instructional leader consistently appears in the research on change and effective schooling (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Fullan (1991) stated that “all major research on innovation and school effectiveness shows that the principal strongly influences the likelihood of change” (p.
Other studies focused on shared decision making and restructuring identified the school principal as the key player in all such efforts (David, 1989b; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Rude, 1993; Wohlsetetter, 1995). Therefore, it is vitally important to explore the role of the principal in shared decision making (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992).

One variable affecting the implementation of shared decision making or teacher empowerment is the concept of willingness, the principal’s willingness to empower and teacher’s desire to participate. In a study of empowered schools, Short, Greer, and Melvin (1994) reported that teacher participation in decision making only occurs in schools where principals promote teacher participation. Such teacher empowerment requires the principal to develop a collaborative climate based on trust and respect (Blase & Blasé, 1994; Licata & Teddlie, 1990; Wall & Rinehart, 1998). From their study of teachers in 117 schools, Wall and Rinehart (1998) also suggested that a principal’s willingness to empower teachers is contingent upon his or her training to facilitate participatory decision making.

In schools where shared decision making is less successful, the principals resist giving up control. Wohlsetter (1995) studied 44 schools that had operated under school-based management for no less than four years. Failure was often cited as a result of autocratic principals. Teachers reported that such principals often attempted to manipulate decisions to support their personal vision for the school and promote their own agendas. These principals’ behavior resulted in conflict and a lack of teacher ownership. To successfully create a culture of empowerment, principals must rethink their use of power and control (Keedy & Finch, 1994). Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley (1993) stated that leaders should use facilitative power, which they defined as “the ability
to help others achieve a set of ends that may be shared, negotiated, or complementary” (p. 70). The use of facilitative power gives the principal the ability to have influence through others rather than power over them. They further argued that successful change will occur through people, not rules and regulations. A principal’s power is not finite; it is increased through the empowerment of others.

The principal’s attitude also affects teacher willingness to participate. As reported earlier, Smylie’s (1992) study of teachers in a Midwestern metropolitan school district revealed that the principal-teacher relationship is a strong predictor of successful teacher participation in decision making. Teachers are more willing to participate in decision making if they perceive their relationship with the principal as “open, collaborative, facilitative, and supportive” (p. 63). They are less willing to participate if their relationship is perceived as closed and controlling. Blase (1987) supported the importance of relationships by stating that effective principals nurtured participation through the development of trusting and respectful relationships with teachers.

Principals of schools in which shared decision making is successful must understand consensus building and create collaborative environments, which encourage teachers and parents to experiment with innovation (Flinspach & Ryan, 1994). The shared decision making process is dependent upon the principal’s experiences, skills, and abilities to promote participatory decision making. Principals must “move the scope of authority from participation to empowerment”; this operationalizes shared decision making into a genuine shared governance culture (Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan, 1995, p. 151). “The successful leader, then, is one who build-up the leadership of others and who strives to become a leader of leaders” (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 27). Effective
principals foster leadership among followers and create structures through which they may practice leadership.

**Educational Practices of the Inclusion Process**

**Organizational Structure**

One of the greatest challenges contributing to the debate between segregating special students and inclusion is the lack of similarity between the regular and special education systems in today’s districts and schools (Elliott & Riddle, 1992; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988). Successful inclusion practices depend on restructured schools that allow for flexible learning environments, with flexible curricula and instruction. Under ideal conditions, all students work toward the same overall educational outcomes. What differs is the level at which these outcomes are achieved, the additional support that is needed by some students and the degree of emphasis placed on various outcomes. According to Guess and Thompson (1989) and Heshusius (1988), a restructured system merges special and general education and must also employ practices that focus on high expectations for all and reject the prescriptive teaching, remedial approach that leads to lower achievement.

Fullan (2007) suggests that school leaders play a key role in school improvement and improving student achievement outcomes. For example, a review of research evidence by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) revealed that school leaders engage in a range of activities that improve teacher practice and student outcomes. These activities include building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program. As schools are restructured and teacher practices are improved, school leaders also
participate in more general school-improvement activities, such as: 1) develop a school culture that is supportive of teachers; 2) provide opportunities to develop teachers as leaders within the school; 3) develop a collaborative learning community that is supportive of teacher learning; and 4) provide teachers with opportunities for high-quality professional development (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

**Professional Learning Communities**

In an effort to address the need for more information on response to learner diversity, school districts may offer professional development opportunities for their teachers. These sessions are usually led by consultants who have been trained in the topic of interest and who serve as role models and coaches in a given strategy (Dettmer, Landrum, & Miller, 2006). Teachers are then left to work together in their professional learning communities to develop best practices for increasing student achievement. Major characteristics of a professional learning community include having a supportive environment where there are shared visions, values, and goals. There is also open dialogue and collaboration among teachers. Both exceptional education and general education teachers practice supportive, shared leadership and engage in ongoing inquiry and reflective practice. All of the focus is on student-centered school improvement. Little (2003) conducted research focusing on interactions of professional learning communities. Her findings revealed that the interactions of members of the groups studied supported teacher learning and improvement of practice as evidenced by allocating time to talk about problems in their practice, revealing their dilemmas to each other, exploring their problems openly, and sharing specific classroom materials, such as student work, to find solutions.
On the same note, Wood’s (2007) investigation focused on the positive outcomes of PLCs. Some of these outcomes included increased collaboration and more discussion about teacher practice and student work, enhanced trust among participants, and an increased focus on students and their needs. Studies show that when teachers participate in PLCs, a change will occur in the culture and climate. Professional development training opportunities were influential in helping educators modify their philosophy of exceptional education to focus on a student “needs-based” approach rather than focus on the disability of the student (Wang & Reynolds, 1996). This change of philosophy supported by staff development opportunities was also instrumental in helping school districts in the state of Colorado promote the concept of inclusion (McNulty et al., 1996). Educators began to focus on how to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms as well as provide individualized instruction to students with disabilities (Zigmond, 2001). With this change, many different beliefs and attitudes of teachers towards inclusion have been noted.

**Collaboration**

A dominant theme in the research on inclusion is the concept of collaboration. In a study of Purkey and Smith (1985), effective cultural change was found to be most successful when collaboration among the faculty is encouraged. Collaboration can serve as a tool for enhancing positive attitudes about inclusion, as well. According to a study by Jackson, Ryndak, and Billingsley (2000), the importance of collaboration and active promotion of inclusive values, as well as how the services are delivered, are key themes or elements for a successful inclusion program. Collaboration can also serve as a method to maintain the focus on the best possible solutions and the best situations for the special
students and the regular students. School principals are invaluable in the collaboration process.

Effective collaboration between teachers is characterized by personality traits of teachers and other qualities considered essential. An overarching characteristic of successful collaboration found in the literature is collegiality between the general education teacher and the exceptional education teacher (Dettmer et al., 2002). To support a collegial atmosphere between teachers, support, respect, communication, and cooperation are characteristics each teacher must possess (Dettmer et al., 2002, 2005; Minke et al., 1996) Additionally, Friend and Cook (2007) further describe elements of effective collaboration between teachers, saying, “participation is voluntary, parity among participants is required, mutual goals are developed, a shared responsibility for participation and decision making is insured, teachers share resources, and teachers share accountability for student outcomes” (p. 8 – 12).

In a collaborative teaching arrangement, both teachers combine their expertise to determine effective methods to deliver the curricular content by modifying instructional methods, materials, and curriculum (Haynes, 2006; Stanovich, 1996). The exceptional educator usually has expertise in designing an alternate instructional delivery model; whereas, the general education teacher is skilled in the area of curriculum (Friend, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2005). A study by Janney et al. (1995) found that general education teachers appreciated the practical, student-specific information shared by the exceptional education teacher. The study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) also supported a feeling of satisfaction by exceptional education teachers participating in collaborative relationships with general education teachers. A reciprocal relationship can develop in a collaborative
partnership between a general education teacher and an exceptional education teacher (Haynes, 2006).

Historically, teaching has been described as a lonely profession with teachers working almost in total isolation (Lortie, 1975). Isolation is especially a problem for exceptional education teachers, as they are often not even considered a part of the school (Goodlad, 1984). The most promising initiative in schools today to address the isolation of exceptional education teachers is collaboration between exceptional education and general education teachers (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997). Friend and Cook (2007) stated, “Beginning with the premise that schools are a reflection of larger society, the current trend toward collaboration in the United States…makes it quickly apparent why collaboration is such a significant trend in schools” (p. 19). A study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that exceptional education teachers believed that collaboration between an exceptional education teacher and a general education teacher is necessary for students with disabilities to be included in general education classrooms. However, a culture of collaboration in a school can be difficult to create; it is evolutionary and one that takes time to foster, especially between teachers who have traditionally belonged to two different professional and organizational cultures: general and exceptional education (Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Skrtic, 1991).

According to McLaughlin (2009) creating a climate that supports teachers while promoting continuous improvements is critical to effective exceptional education. Effective school leaders can promote the success of all students by creating and sustaining a school culture that is conducive to student learning and professional growth and respect. In terms of both policies and school-level practices, exceptional education is
School leaders must help teachers reshape beliefs and attitudes toward students with disabilities as they implement a shared decision of high expectations for all students. The central challenge for school leaders is to bring together the requirements to provide an appropriate education within the most inclusive setting that will lead to higher levels of achievement for students with disabilities (McLaughlin, 2009).

School leaders must promote the success of all students. Time and effort must be put into the planning and implementation process. This includes facilitating the development and implementation of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the community. School leaders need to ensure that exceptional education students, teachers and services are fully integrated into the vision and the ongoing operations of the school (McLaughlin, 2009).

School leaders must give significant attention to providing the kinds of ongoing professional development that expands the capacity of both general and exceptional education teachers to serve students with a variety of disabilities in a mainstream setting. Resources must be provided, including time for collaborative planning, support personnel that might be necessary, materials, and assistive technologies (Boyd-Dimock, 1992). School leaders must be mindful of the changing concerns that the staff, parents, and others have as greater inclusion begins to be implemented. A unified school must be created in which exceptional and general education teachers and other specialists work together to meet shared goals.

Leading for change is probably the most critical role of school leaders today. Research has shown that school leaders have often delegated responsibility for
exceptional education to teachers. This is a perfectly good policy as long as they are fully accountable for the students who receive exceptional education services and are aware of what constitutes exceptional education practice. Collaboration is a key feature of schools and there is solid evidence that collaboration results in better outcomes for students with disabilities (McLaughlin, 2004).

**Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching is a specific form of collaboration that involves the partnership of two or more teaching professionals sharing instructional and classroom management of a single general education classroom (Dettmer et al., 2005; Friend & Cook, 2007; Villa et al., 2004). Many times the terms “team teaching” and “co-teaching” are used interchangeably to describe a shared, supportive arrangement between an exceptional education teacher and a general education teacher (Friend & Cook, 2007). Literature reviewed supported both terms and for this study, thus the terms “team teaching” and “co-teaching” are used interchangeably. Co-teaching can look different from school to school and classroom to classroom. Scholars and educators even disagree on co-teaching definitions and models. Villa et al. (2004) described four primary models: supportive teaching, parallel teaching, complementary teaching, and team teaching.

These co-teaching models are progressive; that is, as teachers become more experienced, they move to a higher level of co-teaching. Supportive teaching is the beginning level and involves one teacher delivering the instruction while the other teacher provides classroom management support. This approach is most commonly used when teachers first begin co-teaching. Parallel teaching involves the two teachers dividing the class into groups with each teacher delivering the lesson to his/her group of
students. The students may rotate between groups. This is another approach commonly used by teachers new to the co-teaching concept. Complementary teaching occurs when co-teachers share the teaching role by supporting the other while one is teaching. For example, one teacher may model note-taking skills on the board while the other teacher is delivering the instruction. Team teaching requires that both teachers actually share in all aspects of classroom instruction, management, and student responsibilities. Co-teachers who team-teach divide the lessons in ways that allow the students to experience each teacher’s strengths and expertise. In this model, both teachers are comfortable alternately taking the lead and being the supporter. As co-teacher teams gain confidence, complementary teaching and team teaching become the preferred collaborative teaming models.

Friend and Cook (2007) described six approaches to a co-teaming arrangement: One teaching, one observing; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternate teaching; teaming; and one teaching, one assisting. Unlike Villa et al.’s (2004) progressive model of co-teaching, Friend and Cook (2007) provide a menu of options. One teaching, one observing occurs when one professional teaches while the other observes. The first teacher delivers the instruction to the group while the second teacher monitors students and collects individual or group data. Station Teaching is an approach where co-teachers create and deliver instruction at different stations for students to rotate through during class time. In Parallel Teaching, teachers jointly plan the lesson, but divide the class in half. Each teacher delivers the lesson to his or her half of the class. The students do not rotate as in station teaching. Alternate Teaching involves one teacher working with a small group of students while the other instructs the large group in some content or
activity that the small group can afford to miss. Teaming requires both teachers to be responsible for planning the lesson. Both teachers share the instruction, monitor students, and facilitate group projects. One Teaching, One Assisting describes the practice of one teacher delivering the classroom instruction while the other provides management by monitoring student behavior. The co-teaching model educators choose to practice is dependent on student need and how best teachers can support individual student learning needs in the general education classroom.

**Effective Inclusion Practices**

Researchers consistently report strategies and practices for effective inclusion. Etschedit (2006) described the importance of staff development and training for improved inclusion outcomes. She stated, “professional development activities could demonstrate how teachers and care providers in inclusive settings support children’s achievements by embedding learning opportunities that build on the child’s interests” (p. 175). With this additional knowledge, appropriate student placement occurs based on their students’ strengths and ability levels. Additionally, Downing, Spencer, and Cavallaro (2004) researched the development of a charter school. Within their study, the researchers identified four themes in strong inclusion classes. One of the four areas of critical components for successful inclusion included the following sub-themes: active parent involvement, high-quality faculty and staff, enrichment opportunities, individualization of the core curriculum, and belief in inclusion.

Another of the four themes discussed in the article included positive outcomes of the inclusive environment, including acceptance of diversity, student achievement, development of friendships, positive and supportive environments, professional growth
of personnel, and collaborative teaming. When these themes were emphasized, the researchers discovered improvements in academics. The concept of collaboration within inclusion allows students to benefit from all experts and professionals involved in their education. This calls for an entire educational program team to collaborate on the appropriate needs and therapies before the student ever receives interventions. Teachers learn specific problem-solving skills by working together with other building teachers to meet the needs of students in their classes (Vandercook & York-Barr, 1995). Staff development opportunities focused in instructional strategies provides benefits for all students. According to Bauwens and Houreade (1995), cooperative teaching through collaboration between the general education and special education teachers provide impressively powerful instruction, thus promoting success for students with special needs in the general education classrooms.

Not only do teachers benefit from inclusion, but students with disabilities benefit as well. According to Janney and Snell (1998) benefits of inclusion are psychological, social, and cognitive for students with disabilities. These benefits include, but are not limited to, not being separated from typical peers but sharing class membership; having increased social relationships; being able to expand a peer network and make friends; and acquire peers who can be models of communication, social skills, dress, and style (Janney & Snell, 1998). Schwartz (1998) also noted that special needs children have an opportunity to expand peer networks and form meaningful relationships with students in the mainstream. Increased alertness to improve academic learning and motivation for learning is the greatest cognitive skill gained (Janney & Snell, 1998).
Inclusion allows for a practice called peer tutoring in which general education students help special education students. This fosters communication skills and cooperation. This has also been proven by research. A study done by Fryxell and Kennedy (1995) analyzed the effects of placement in a general education or self-contained classroom on the social relationships of 18 students with severe disabilities. Hunt and Goetz (1977) found that special education students placed in the general education classroom socialized with their classmates at higher levels. In turn, they received higher levels of social support from their classmates who did not have disabilities. Another study by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) found that friendships between students with and without disabilities were not based on a tutorial relationship, but involved a more give and take relationship with both students taking equal roles (Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

Also, parents of students without disabilities encouraged and supported inclusive education and the friendships their children formed with students with disabilities. These friendships were also supported by teachers in the school and other personnel. The special education students disliked being removed from their peers in their own classroom (Yatvin, 1995). According to Yatvin (1995), “They prefer being counted among the slower members of the class to being publicly acknowledged dummies, sent away to who-knows-where for who-knows-what” (Yatvin, 1995). As a result of being forced away from peers, the students will resist learning and show how “emotionally disturbed and disabled they can be” (Yatvin, 1995). Therefore, letting them stay in the inclusive environment caused or led to fewer behavioral outbursts. Inclusion has so many positive aspects to it. It not only allows special students to benefit, but the regular
students benefit as well. The goal of an inclusive education is to promote the academic and social integration of students (Stinson, 1999). It also allows for diverse collaboration and a higher self-esteem for the disabled.

**Ineffective Inclusion Practices**

Despite the research on the effective inclusion practices as described above, including students with disabilities in the classroom does create difficulties. Not everyone is excited about bringing students with disabilities into the general education classroom. In a study based on perceptions surrounding inclusion, Buell, Hallam, Gamel-Mccormick and Scheer (1999) found general and exceptional education teachers demonstrated “the strongest positive relationship between understanding inclusion and the belief that teachers can influence students” (p. 152). However, the educators claimed they need additional support in the area of class-size, in-service training, and time to collaborate (Buell et. al., 1999, p. 151). In addition, Salend and Duhaney (1999) reviewed 19 interviews. Of the 19 respondents, 17 claimed they experienced an initial frustration, but a change in attitude after having a student in an inclusive environment.

Inclusion standard bearers suggest the very act of labeling a student as “special” frequently lowers the value and their self-esteem (Reynolds, 2003). A lot of the times when students are taken out of the regular classroom settings and placed in an isolated special needs room, it makes the students feel as if they do not belong, lowering their self-esteem. When they are isolated, special students perform poorly, both socially and academically (Lewis, 1991). Teachers also begin to lower their standards for students with disabilities because there is not one with stronger mental abilities to push them. Studies have shown that oftentimes, educators in inclusive settings feel they lack
sufficient preparation or training to instruct students with disabilities, and as a result they doubt their abilities to support students in inclusive settings (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Kosko and Wilkins (2009) suggested that college coursework is often seen as ineffective and that teachers have received too few hours of professional development to prepare them to instruct students with disabilities. A teacher in the inclusive classroom cannot be expected to be successful with students who have disabilities without a solid foundation of knowledge about students’ disabilities and their educational needs. It can be quite overwhelming to implement diverse instructional strategies when one has limited knowledge about potential modifications and accommodations to facilitate the academic success of students with disabilities.

Tornillo (1994), president of the Florida Education Association United, expressed that inclusion is too frequently implemented without providing classroom teachers the resources, training, and other supports necessary to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. Consequently, “the disabled children are not getting appropriate, specialized attention and care, and the regular students’ education is disrupted constantly.” He further argued that inclusion does not make sense in light of pressures from state legislatures and the public at large to develop higher academic standards and to improve the academic achievement of students by expanding the range of ability levels in a classroom through inclusion. Tornillo (1994) argued that teachers are required to direct inordinate attention to a few, thereby decreasing the amount of time and energy directed toward the rest of the class. Indeed, the range of abilities is just too great for one teacher to adequately teach. Consequently, the mandates for greater academic accountability and achievement are unable to be met.
Lieberman and Houston-Wilson (2009) pointed out that many advocates (primarily parents) for those with learning disabilities also have significant concerns about the wholesale move toward inclusion. Their concerns stem from the fact that they have had to fight long and hard for appropriate services and programs for their children. They recognize that students with learning disabilities do not progress academically without individualized attention to their educational needs. These services have evolved primarily through a specialized teacher working with these individually or in small groups, usually in a resource room setting. Many successful practices have been researched and identified (Lyon & Vaughn, 1999). Special education professionals and parents alike are concerned that general education teachers have neither the time, nor the expertise to meet their children’s needs. “The learning disabilities field seems to recognize that being treated as an individual can usually be found more easily outside the regular classroom” (Lyon & Vaughn, 1999).

A poll conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in West Virginia revealed that “78 percent of respondents think disabled students won’t benefit from inclusion; 87 percent said other students won’t benefit either” (Leo, 1998). Citing numerous concerns expressed by many of its national membership, the AFT has urged a moratorium on the national rush toward full inclusion. Their members were specifically concerned that students with disabilities were “monopolizing an inordinate amount of time and resources and, in some cases, creating violent classroom environments” (Sklaroff, 1999). According to Sklaroff (1999), they further cite that when inclusion efforts fail, it is frequently due to “lack of appropriate training for teachers in mainstream classrooms, ignorance about inclusion among senior-level administrators, and a general
lack of funding for resources and training.” One additional concern of the AFT and others (Tornillo, 1995; Leo, 1998) is a suspicion that school administration’s motives for moving toward more inclusive approaches are often more of a budgetary (cost-saving) measure than out of concern for what is really best for students. If students with disabilities can be served in regular classrooms, then the more expensive special education service costs due to additional personnel, equipment, materials, and classrooms can be reduced. “But supporters argue that, while administrators may see inclusion as a means to save funds by lumping together all students in the same facilities, inclusion rarely costs less than segregated classes when the concept is implemented responsibly” (Sklaroff, 1999).

Regular educators are not the only ones concerned about a perceived wholesale move toward full inclusion. Some special educators and parents of students with disabilities also have reservations. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), a large, international organization of special educators, parents, and other advocates for the disabled, issued a policy statement on inclusion at their annual convention in 1993. This statement begins with a strong endorsement for a continuum of services to be available to children, youth and young adults with disabilities. It is only after making the point quite clear that services to the disabled, including various placement options besides the regular classroom, are to be tailored to individual student needs, that the policy actually addresses inclusion. The concept of inclusion is a meaningful goal to be pursued in our schools and communities. Children, youth, and young adults with disabilities should be served whenever possible in general education classrooms in inclusive neighborhood schools and community settings (CEC policy, 1993).
Summary of Literature Review

Chapter two included a review of the literature relative to my case study. The first section discussed the history of inclusion and various studies with inclusion research. There was a vigorous debate about the feasible theory of full inclusion in the general education setting. The United States Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) opinion of inclusion as it relates to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) specified the belief that IDEA rules mean all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, should be in a general education classroom/program to the maximum extent possible.

The chapter included a literature synopsis on the inclusion setting and practices utilized with students with disabilities in the general education setting. The isolation of exceptional education teachers and students from their general education counterparts can promote a sense of inequity in schools where a lack of social justice for some students with disabilities becomes a prevailing issue (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). According to Shields (2004) and Marshall and Olivia (2010), aspiring leaders should encourage the value and promote the development of relationships within the school and the community. Also, they should welcome different perspectives, and engage in sustained conversations about differences. If all students do not have the same opportunity to receive the benefits of a full education, a deficit view of students may become engrained in teacher beliefs of student abilities (Benard, 1997). Labeling students with disabilities and providing their education in separate settings also fosters a deficit view of them (Gaustad, 1999). In contrast, when students with disabilities receive an appropriate education in the general education classrooms with exceptional and general education
teachers working together to provide appropriate educational opportunities for all
students, a view of student assets is fostered (Villa & Thousand, 2000).

The literature focused on the roles of the building administrator in shared decision
making. Building level administrators must work collaboratively with the teachers to
provide support and promote the vision to improve the learning outcomes of all students.
Leadership of this sort still needs the school leader to maintain control over the decision
making process, but assist in letting the process work rather than impose decisions
(Barry, 1994). Working with people, developing relationships and building a climate and
culture that supports the vision and goals of the school are strong roles a building level
administrator should play in order for students with disabilities to be successful.

Research described the educational practices of the inclusion process. According
to David (1989), the discussion of organizational structure has progressed from
improving the existing educational system through top-down, bureaucratic initiatives to
restructuring the organization and governance of the schools. Schools are structured to
meet the needs of the general population by categorizing students and placing them in
appropriate classes according to their least restrictive environment. Researchers have
further reported that professional learning communities and training opportunities are
important supports for successful inclusion of students with exceptional needs in general
education classrooms (Friend, 2007). It was also noted that teacher collaboration
reinforces partnership skills and collaboration has been identified as a skill the students
will need in the 21st Century as they live and work in a global, interdependent society
(Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Malgeri, 1996). Several studies were conducted about co-
teaching as a form of teacher collaboration. It was brought forth in part by exceptional
education laws mandating that students with special needs receive instruction in general education classrooms. It included strategies and approaches teachers could include as they move into co-teaching classrooms. The rationale for this study concluded that co-teaching could provide benefits for exceptional and general education students and teachers. Effective communication skills practiced by both teachers support this sharing of beliefs and promote collaboration skills by both educators (Pugach & Johnson, 2002).

This chapter concludes with a review of the literature describing the effective and ineffective inclusion practices. Although there are drawbacks and barriers to inclusion, such as lack of training, time, and expertise, it is possible to overcome these issues. The process of inclusion is not simple. In fact, sometimes, there are downfalls; however, many teachers choose to work through the pitfalls to help students succeed. In order to achieve this optimal success, general and exceptional teachers use effective inclusive practices. The concept of schools moving from a traditional community of teacher isolation toward becoming a collaborative community was reflected in the literature; this collaboration will assist in preparing students for future endeavors. Students with severe disabilities are attending their neighborhood schools more often than not. They have come from institutions, from self-contained special education schools, and from isolation at home. As educators move toward educational goals for the schools of the 21st Century, the general direction is to serve students with special needs in inclusive settings. This integration has increased in U.S. schools, but barriers to total acceptance remain.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter discusses the research design and methods of the study. The context within which the research was conducted is discussed. The researcher’s position is defined and the research participants are described. This chapter explains data collection, analysis methods and procedures. The purpose of this study was to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices in one school. Information was gathered by the researcher through informal observations, formal interviews and a review of written documents utilized during common planning time with the general and exceptional education teachers since these teachers can best identify how shared decision making and collaboration impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices within the general education classroom in this setting. Obtaining the information through multiple sources provided and improved validity for this case study. Additionally, general and exceptional education teachers were invited to provide member checks of interview transcripts, summaries of interview data, and results sections of this research.

Research Questions

It is important to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion
practices. Seeking to describe an example of this relationship, the following research questions were developed:

1. How does shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective inclusion practices?
2. How does a lack of shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers lead to ineffective inclusion practices and challenges?

**Description of Research Design and Methods**

The research design appropriate for this topic was an exploratory case study. This design was used to gather data to answer the research questions. According to Easterbrook (2001), an exploratory case study is ideal for analyzing what is common and/or different across cases that share some key criteria. They are appropriate for preliminary studies in which it is not yet clear which phenomena were important, or how to measure these phenomena. Such designs involve direct engagement with the participants to obtain an in-depth description and interpretation of behavior within a culture or social group (McMillan & Wergin, 2006).

Exploratory studies help develop a better understanding of a situation or a given question. They allow researchers to formulate more complex or precise research questions for further studies. Examples of exploratory designs include needs assessments, literature reviews, case studies, and interviews (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). The theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research do not provide strict propositions about the empirical world, as in quantitative research. Rather, qualitative research is more of a paradigm or loose collection of logically-related assumptions and concepts that guide
research: a way of looking at the world, the assumptions people make about what is important, and what makes the world work (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Case studies have been used in educational research to develop critical thinking. The significant feature of a case study is its aim to capture all of the details of a particular individual or group, which are relevant to the purpose of the study. Case studies showcase the complexities and uniqueness of the context as they rely on multiple sources of data. Meyers and Sylvester (2006) contend that qualitative research offers much promise in answering questions about the social validity or acceptability of evidence-based interventions, the extent to which they are transportable from the structured, controlled environments of research to the realities of daily practice, and the cultural variables that may impact their implementation. Qualitative research allows the researcher to draw on his/her experiences and conclusions, ask questions, and interpret data within a personal set of parameters.

Using an exploratory case study research design for this dissertation allowed for the conduct of research within the real-life context to identify the experiences of shared decision making and collaboration among teachers in an elementary school. After the researcher was granted permission from the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A) to conduct the study, the researcher met with the general and exceptional education teachers to discuss this case study and request their participation. Written consent forms were received from each participant before the actual research commenced. The researcher was significantly aware of the importance of eliciting cooperation, trust and acceptance of the participants throughout the study. To that end, the confidentiality of all data gathered was assured.
Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative case study design was used to select data collection methods that would allow the participants to share their stories of how inclusion was implemented and its impact on themselves and their students. The use of multiple data sources allowed the researcher to triangulate the data collected as well as validate the findings related to the inclusion process (Patton, 2002). Observations, interviews and a review of written documents relevant to the study were used as instruments in this case study.

First, informal observations were utilized as a tool for collecting data in this qualitative case study. Direct observation allowed the researcher to approach data collection in an open-ended manner and to discourage any preconceptions that the researcher may have had about the research site and/or participants. Observations were used to help the researcher understand the context of the implementation of the inclusion process. The observations took place one time per week over a period of six weeks in the classroom. Conducting classroom observations allowed the researcher to note effective and ineffective practices of the general and exceptional education teachers engaged with each other.

Next, formal interviews with each of the study participants were conducted. These interviews occurred over a six week period. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes, depending on participant responses. An interview protocol was established that included questions designed to allow participants to respond in their own words (see Appendix C). The interview questions were organized into three categories related to the research questions. Data were collected through interviews using open-ended questions to allow the participants to articulate their experience about the decision making process of
inclusion. According to Patton (2002), interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to see the world from another person’s perspective. Each formal interview allowed the researcher to be free to explore beyond the questions listed in the protocol and to guide the conversation keeping the focus on the particular research topic. The data collected during the interviews was recorded using a tape recorder from which the data was transcribed verbatim.

Last, the researcher examined available written documents relevant to the study. These documents included teacher lesson plans, materials/resource lists, and student IEPs. They were used as a source of information pertaining to the efforts made by the general and exceptional education teacher to identify how shared decision making and collaboration impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices.

Additional observation data was obtained through observation of teachers during their planning time. This gave the researcher the opportunity to identify how teachers shared decisions and collaboration contributed to effective and ineffective inclusion practices. While the general and exceptional education teachers are typically observed and monitored on a consistent basis as a part of the building level administrator’s supervision process, close attention was paid to the collaboration of these two distinct individuals. During common planning times, general education teachers collaborated with exceptional education teachers to plan for co-teaching lessons and activities. They also provided necessary modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Observations of these experiences provided a way to develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics that have and have not allowed shared decisions to develop among the teachers.
Data Analysis

In this case study, the data analysis was ongoing as data were collected. This process allowed the researcher to uncover important information and employ a series of procedures for analyzing the data. Data from the observations, interviews and written documents were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicated that the constant comparative method is a technique for data analysis when there are multi-data sources. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984a), the constant comparative method involves categorical coding, which creates emergent patterns and themes.

The constant comparative method undertaken for this exploratory case study was used to analyze the notes from the observations, interviews and written documents. The constant comparative method involves breaking down the data into units and coding them into categories (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To ensure that the researcher was thoroughly familiar with the data before analysis, the information was systematically coded, analyzed, and arranged into as many categories as possible. The procedures of making comparisons and asking questions about the data assisted in categorizing and adding information to previously identified categories that were obtained from the review of literature. Each observation and interview was assigned a number based upon the type of data collected. Analysis occurred as new data were added from the researcher’s field notes. A matrix was developed to organize the data collected from the written documents during the common planning time between the general and exceptional education teachers.
A comprehensive review of literature provided a list of practices used in this research to define features of shared decision making and collaboration used in the inclusion process for the general and exceptional educational teachers who were participants in this study. Table 1 provides the listing of the practices used to categorize evidence from interviews, observations, and written documents relevant to the study in responding to the research questions for this study.
Table 1

*Effective and Ineffective Inclusion Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator guides and supports inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers believe they are accountable for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Teaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive and Supportive Environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development opportunities and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer tutoring that fosters communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ineffective Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labeling a student exceptional education lowers their self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funding for resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriate training for teachers in mainstream classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing the one-on-one with inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent negative attitudes from teachers toward students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased workload of general education teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of classroom with an overload of students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness

Glasser and Strauss (1967) note the concepts of validity and reliability are relatively foreign to the field of qualitative research. Instead of focusing on reliability and validity, qualitative researchers substitute data trustworthiness. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria that he believed should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study. These include: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability. Trustworthiness depends on the researcher’s moral, ethical, and academic judgments about the research process and the report thereof (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility for this case study’s observations, interviews and written documents was achieved using the strategy of triangulation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that triangulation is accomplished by asking the same research questions of different study participants and by collecting data from different sources and by using different methods to answer those research questions. Member checks occurred when data interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained. This was done both formally and informally as opportunities for member checks may arise during the normal course of observation and conversation. Participants were generally appreciative of the member check process, and knowing that they had a chance to verify their statements tended to cause study participants to willingly fill in any gaps from earlier interviews. Trust was an important aspect of the member check process and it is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility.

In addition to member checks, the researcher also utilized thick, rich descriptions. Thick, rich descriptions are described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving
a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Thick, rich description refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997). While qualitative research is subject to some threats to validity, it is important to note that all participants of the present study volunteered to be part of the research, and as best as could be determined, participants gave honest answers to the interview questions. The participants were told that everything they said would be confidential. Participants showed no signs of hesitation when questioned about confidentiality. Once interviews began and certain themes began to emerge, the researcher continued to keep information confidential and placed great value upon the trust among the participants.

**Researcher’s Role**

Qualitative research is influenced by the belief system from which a researcher approaches the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher’s position in this study is grounded in the belief system that has been constructed as a result of 14 years of a career in public education. This belief system aligned itself with how information was gathered and interpreted by the researcher. Interest and experience as a researcher and administrator in elementary classroom settings with full inclusion and now as an administrator supporting educational practices for inclusion led to a desire to study the teachers of students with disabilities who are making dramatic academic improvements while receiving exceptional education services in general education classrooms. It is the belief of the researcher that building level administrators and teachers are the most
critical elements when planning for student achievement. It is further believed that all teachers can be empowered to teach all students, and student achievement can increase more if teachers share decisions and collaborate than if they work alone.

During the teaching tenure of the researcher, she taught second and third grade for five years. Also, she held the position of a literacy coach for two years. As a general education teacher, the researcher had the privilege of working with students with disabilities in her classroom. As a first year teacher, 2 out of 24 were identified as students with disabilities. She believed that all students had the ability to learn. She embraced the opportunity to work with students of all ability levels. While acting as a general education teacher, the researcher experienced working with the exceptional education teachers, who were very helpful in assisting her. The exceptional education teachers made themselves available for support by co-teaching in different subjects and encouraging the general education teacher/researcher to believe that the students would be successful. She loved working with students with disabilities and successfully met the challenges in meeting their needs. She tried to be sensitive to their needs, but also allow them as much independence as possible in the general education setting. It is the researcher’s stance that teachers, both general and exceptional education, should be mindful that students with disabilities should be learning in their least restrictive environment. From the perspective of the researcher in the present study, providing general education teachers with support will improve the overall implementation of inclusion by making it more beneficial to all, both general and exceptional education students.
The researcher believes that general and exceptional education teachers working together have a powerful influence on student learning, a condition that will likely influence data analysis and findings. During the administrative tenure of the researcher, she had encouraged relationships that resulted in a collaborative partnership. The teachers planned lessons together, delivered instruction in inclusion environments, and used data to drive instruction. Since teacher collaboration had been prioritized in this school by this researcher for four years, this study was conducted to complete an in-depth analysis on how shared decision making and collaboration between general education and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. Previous experiences and beliefs drove the researcher’s desire to hear the stories of others who have been involved in the inclusion process.

**Description of Participants**

A fundamental tenet of qualitative research is that local context is central to the understanding of a phenomenon (Pugach, 2001). To understand context surrounding this study, this section provided a description of the specifics associated with the implementation of inclusion for exceptional education students. This study explored the inclusion practices, experiences, and processes of an elementary school in an urban school district in the south. Permission to conduct this study was secured from the superintendent of the district. In order to ensure anonymity for the school and participants, pseudonyms have been used throughout this document.

Study participants included seven general education teachers and four exceptional education teachers from the elementary school in the south. Since the present study aimed to examine the impact of inclusive instruction of exceptional education students inside
the general education classroom alongside general education teachers and students, this school and teacher participants were selected. Each classroom represented in this study requires general and exceptional education practices with several students with disabilities in each classroom. Therefore, of the 20 general education teachers, seven general education teachers who served multiple students with disabilities became the general education teacher participants of focus for this research. The seven general education and four exceptional education teacher participants service a total of 37 exceptional education students. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names of participants when using data from interviews, observations, and documents to illustrate findings.

The participants for this study were certified staff members at the previously school identified. This study’s participants were chosen. While there are three teachers per grade level (Prekindergarten through fifth grade), only one teacher was selected from each grade level. As a means of protection for the staff members, school district, and specified school, names have been changed to pseudonyms. The group of participating individuals includes seven general education teachers and four exceptional education teachers.

**Summary**

A general acceptance of methods was used for data collection and data analysis. Triangulation was used to merge the data. The method of data collection involved observations, interviews, and documents. The participants’ observations and interviews as they relate to shared decisions and collaboration were included as data to describe the impact on effective and ineffective inclusion practices. The researcher collected data by
using a qualitative research design. The research was conducted in an ethical manner by complying with IRB guidelines to ensure validity and reliability. The responses obtained from the participants provided in-depth descriptions to identify how collaboration among general and exceptional education teachers impacted inclusion practices in a classroom setting.
CHAPTER IV
THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Chapter IV is a presentation of the results of the research. It provides the findings from data collected and analyzed during the course of the case study. The purpose was to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between the general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. Insight into this collaborative partnership between the general and exceptional education teachers was gained through observations, interviews, and a review of written documents. The findings presented were established by reviewing observation field notes, interview transcripts and looking for patterns that emerged from the data.

This chapter is presented in four sections: (a) participants – general and exceptional education teachers, (b) informal observations, (c) teacher interviews, and (d) review of documents. Three themes are discussed that were identifiable as recurrent to shared decision making among the teachers: (a) collaboration (b) teacher efficacy, and (c) roadblocks/challenges. The researcher made careful decisions about what was significant in the data. The results have been arranged by each participant using pseudonyms to keep their comments confidential. Table 2 provides specific information about each participant.
The participants of this study included a group of 11 individuals coming from a variety of backgrounds, certifications, and experience. One of the participants was a National Board Certified Teacher. Each of the participants was a college graduate and had completed an accredited education program. It was atypical to learn that 100% of the study’s participants possessed a Class AA (Masters) level teaching license. Three of the teachers had been at the same elementary school for 15 or more years. All of this study’s participants were highly qualified teachers according to federal No Child Left Behind standards.

The participants were allocated 150 minutes of planning time per week. Observations revealed that this time varied from week to week, which shows these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Exceptional Education</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Exceptional Education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Exceptional Education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Exceptional Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>General Education (PreK)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>General Education (K)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher G</td>
<td>General Education (1st)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher H</td>
<td>General Education (2nd)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher I</td>
<td>General Education (3rd)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher J</td>
<td>General Education (4th)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher K</td>
<td>General Education (5th)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
individuals’ ability to be flexible and able to adjust well to change. Planning time was 30 minutes for five days or it might be one week consisting of two 45 minute days and two 30 minute days. Each was also given an hour at the end of the instructional day for planning and conferences. Frequency tabulations over the six week period of research revealed that many of these teachers spent 10-15 hours per week planning and developing engaging, inclusive activities for their students. According to district wide goals, the ultimate goal of this school’s certified staff members was for all students to demonstrate some level of growth from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year.

Data Collection

Exceptional Education Teacher Observations

Teacher A. Formal observations of Teacher A for research purposes were conducted two times over a period of six months. Additional observation notes were recorded during the research period of approximately six months. One particular day while the researcher was conducting classroom observations, Teacher A was observed sitting at a center with a group of students working on forming letters using Wikki Sticks. As the students formed the letters, Teacher A and Teacher E modeled the sounds that the letters made. Teacher A worked with a group, while Teacher E walked around helping the students who needed more assistance placing their hands on their necks so they could feel the vibration as they attempted to make the sounds and form their letters.

During another observation, there was evidence of how well Teacher A and Teacher E communicated with each other when the students were transitioning from whole group to small group activities. It was further noted that everyone had their own style and it was hard to tell who the teacher was as they worked with the students. Even
though they were co-teaching, challenges were noted. There were several students who were distracted and off task due to their behavior. One student wanted to stay right beside Teacher A and not transition. It appeared that the needs of the exceptional education students were being met in a least restrictive environment, and the needs of the general education students’ needs were being met by Teacher A and Teacher E working as a team to maximize instruction. This scenario also demonstrated Teacher A’s ability to incorporate diversity into classroom instruction. Other observations of Teacher A included incidences of teacher modeling and appropriate academic instructional attainment. Notes from Teacher A included phrases to students like, “Do you understand?” and “What do you need more help with?”

**Teacher B.** Observations in Teacher B’s room showed a high energy atmosphere to the researcher. Teacher B communicates well with Teachers I, J, and K. The exceptional education students in Teacher B’s room had a tendency to show themselves as very loving and affectionate during observations. Observation notes document behaviors from students like being respectful to peers, cooperative, and positive. Student phrases like “I love being in this class” and “We enjoy learning” were documented during observations in Teacher B’s classroom. Students quickly embraced and acknowledged visitors.

There was one particular exceptional education student in Teacher B’s class who came from a school that was unable to properly provide special services to him due to his multiple disabilities. When he first arrived, he engaged in behaviors that were irate, violent, and could be scary for other students. Teacher B found creative ways to get this student engaged and motivated to learn. One particular observation day, this student was
observed sitting in his desk like the other students, and he raised his hand to ask for permission to play with manipulatives. Once given permission to do so, he seemed to willingly share the manipulatives with a fellow student. He was able to place the materials back in their proper place after playing. A review of this student’s case data provided documentation enough for the researcher to conclude that Teacher B, along with her exceptional education assistant and general education teacher, work collaboratively. They were able to develop a plan that catered to this student’s individual needs. They all stated that more time to plan together was needed to effectively meet the needs of their students.

**Teacher C.** Teacher C was observed while she was attending a team meeting planning with first grade general education teachers. During this observation, the researcher observed Teacher C and the general education teachers discussing the lesson currently being taught and how the inclusion student in one of the general education class was struggling to keep up with the work during class because he was unable to stay focused. Teacher C reminded the teacher to refer to the accommodation page of his IEP so they could discuss what was working and not working to help keep him focused and to review any other areas of concern. Teacher C also informed the general education teacher that his IEP could always be modified and changed by contacting the parent to request an IEP meeting. During that time any additional information that needed to be added including accommodations and modifications could be added or changed. This meeting ended with a discussion about what skills would be taught the following week.

In one observations of Teacher C in collaboration with general education teachers, she made it a priority to obtain copies of lesson plans and textbooks in order to become
more familiar with the lesson that her students would encounter in the inclusive setting. When she would meet with parents, she would display an immense level of reassurance by letting the parents know that their child would never be singled out for a learning disability. However, the identified student would be receiving assistance for the identified area of need. By doing this, they would be receiving instructional assistance and modifications upon entering the inclusive classroom. In doing so, the exceptional education students would be treated no differently than the general education students.

Teacher D. Teacher D was observed teaching as a team, in small groups, and in the pullout method for tutorial. While in the classroom, Teacher D worked with the general education teacher to provide instruction to all students. Both teachers shared the instructional responsibilities of the reading lesson. She was also observed providing a quick assessment to see who needed extra support. She was confident to take on the task of making sure several exceptional education students were participants in the school’s afterschool tutorial program. Teacher D was observed three times, prior to the start of the afterschool program, coming in early, or staying late to assist her exceptional education students with reaching standards.

Teacher D worked with the teachers of the afterschool tutorial program to make sure they had copies of the exceptional education students’ IEP so they would know what accommodations and modifications needed to be provided when working with the students. The help received would allow students to become more successful in the general education classrooms. Her classroom was designed in a conducive learning atmosphere. The researcher quoted Teacher D on several occasions saying, “I treat you all (exceptional education students) no differently than any other teacher treats his or her
students. I believe in setting high expectations for you, but make sure that you know that I am here to support you. I will not accept failure or giving up.”

General Education Teacher Observations

Teacher E – PreKindergarten. The researcher observed Teacher E’s classroom and how eager her students were to learn. It was evident from the classroom design and instructional delivery that she is a very passionate teacher. She asked questions about the letter Mm: “Where have you seen the letter Mm?” Then Teacher A asked, “What do you drink everyday with your lunch?” The students responded by saying, “I had milk in the cafeteria and it starts with the letter Mm.” At this moment, there was evidence of collaboration between Teacher E and Teacher A.

Based on how well they were co-teaching, the researcher was unable to identify who was the teacher. The students were instructed to share with visitors what began with the letter Mm. They excitedly responded by telling visitors that milk and monkey started with the letter Mm. Teacher E and Teacher A celebrated and smiled as they praised students for performing well today. Both teachers shared with each other how well their classes grasped the letter Mm. They decided that they would celebrate with milkshakes.

Teacher F – Kindergarten. Teacher F’s ability to make sure content being taught meets the needs of each student goes beyond her classroom as it was observed as the students were learning their morning routines and several of the students didn’t understand what was expected of them. They forgot to unpack their backpack to turn in their homework folder. They were afraid to tell the teacher. When she found out, she explained that we all make mistakes, but it was important to keep going over the morning routines because practice makes perfect. Teacher C entered the classroom to begin
working with Teacher F to support two students with disabilities. Teacher C was prepared for the lesson due to learning centers taking place the entire week. The activities were discussed during team meetings.

In an effort to address behavior and classroom management, Teacher F uses colored chain links that she slides onto students’ clothing to remind them of their behavior. Everyone starts the day on green; if a student got in trouble, she asked the student the color of the link that he/she was getting (yellow-one reprimand, blue-two reprimands, and red-three reprimands). This particular day, a little girl was talking and being disruptive during the morning crafting session on the rug. Teacher F and Teacher C warned her about her behavior. The little girl began to cry. Believing in fairness, Teacher F and Teacher C assured the little girl that it was important to follow the rules. It was noted that Teacher F and Teacher C were on the same page with reprimanding students. It showed that they have collaborated about the classroom expectations.

**Teacher G – First Grade.** During one of Teacher G’s observation days, the researcher witnessed how well planned her center rotations were. Students were all too familiar with the routine. She would ring a bell once for all students to stand. Center information for various groups was located on the white board, and Teacher G along with Teacher C had discussed with students the expectations for each center. After their discussion, students were asked questions about the learning center expectations. The teacher asked, “How many learning stations do we have for today? Then Teacher C asked, “What do you expect to do in the learning stations?” Once the bell rang twice, students put one finger over their mouths and quietly moved to their center and immediately located the instructions for the station.
The children were well engaged, and the learning activities were meaningful and coincided with the weekly lesson plans. There were stations that catered to each type of learning style: visual, kinesthetic, audio/visual, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Teacher C provided a hands-on activity on story elements, and Teacher G conducted interventions and review of testing skills. It was obvious that Teacher G and Teacher C work very closely together and that Teacher G spends a lot of time putting together engaging activities for students.

**Teacher H – Second Grade.** The researcher noted through observations of Teacher H how professional she was at all times. Without raising her voice or threatening students, she could regain control of her classroom. Teacher H had excellent classroom management and was able to get her class under control with the simple use of hand signals. Using nonverbal cues, she lets her students know exactly what they should be doing. For example, folded arms would indicate to students that they should all have their arms folded. Raising one finger would indicate for the class to stand quietly. Two fingers would indicate for students to line up in a pre-determined fashion. There were other gestures and symbols Teacher H used to which her students readily responded.

This struck the researcher as being a well-structured classroom. While observing Teacher H teaching Math to the students, the exceptional education teacher provided input. She praised the students for performing well. Teacher H and the exceptional education teacher provided support to the students by utilizing peer-tutoring and one-on-one instruction. It was evident that Teacher H and the exceptional education teacher had discussed the need to differentiate instruction especially when teaching students with
disabilities. Both teachers have a range of strategies for students with disabilities as they work to make sure that all students are successful.

**Teacher I – Third Grade.** Teacher I was organized and had routines and procedures in place that make the class and her lessons flow smoothly. When asked why her class and lessons seem to flow so smoothly, she stated that she has her morning routines, agenda, classroom rules, consequences and rewards posted so the students can see them every day. With modeling and practicing, the students were shown how they are supposed to and expected to act in class and in school. During observations, the researcher witnessed the students entering the classroom, and every student followed each step of the morning routine.

As students worked on their morning work, Teacher I and the exceptional education teacher discussed the agenda for today. Both teachers knew the material and were prepared to teach the class as if they were teaching independently. Both teachers have a group during the small group stations. The researcher noted that it was hard to distinguish the exceptional education student from their peers because Teacher I treated all the students the same. She had the same expectations for all her students. During the lesson, the exceptional education teacher used hands-on activities and technology to keep the students highly engaged in the lesson.

**Teacher J – Fourth Grade.** Through observations of Teacher J, the researcher witnessed a very energetic and caring teacher. This teacher had great classroom management skills, modeled, used lectures, and educational videos from a variety of online websites to assist students in understanding the lessons. Anchor charts were created with the students and posted to create reference points for the students in the
classroom. There was one severe behavior problem noted in the classroom. However, the behavior was displayed with the exceptional education teacher. Teacher J had to redirect the student, but the lesson continued without any downtime.

A conversation was observed between both teachers when the exceptional education student, who had mastered the skill in the current group, needed to be moved to another group. The researcher observed the groups were based on a mixture of general education and students with disabilities. The students were excited and willing to work together to complete the hands-on activity that they were assigned. Teacher J shares her lesson plans with the exceptional education teacher via email because planning time is limited due to the exceptional education teacher working with other grade levels.

Teacher K – Fifth Grade. When it comes to a teacher who is not only organized, but also focused on her students and their individual needs, Teacher K is that person. As the researcher observed her, she witnessed that Teacher K has obtainable goals for all her students. She also used data to address areas of weakness and to reteach lessons in reading. Teacher K was very resourceful and technologically prepared for her lessons. The students were provided with morning work on their desk for them to work on the minute the walk through the door. This, according to Teacher K, was to help get them focused and prepared for the day. It was also a way to see if the students remember what has been previously taught.

Teacher K allowed the exceptional education teacher to start her lesson with test prep questions, then introduces and reviews vocabulary. This allowed Teacher K to collect homework and assignments from the previous day. It was noted how well the students use the word wall, dictionaries, and the glossary of their reading book to
complete this part of the lesson. Some of the students used their interactive notebooks because they had notes in them from previous lessons. As the lesson progressed, the exceptional education teacher and the students had such a good rapport with each other that they were very eager to complete the task so they could start on the next one.

Teacher K introduced the small group activities for the day. These included the use of task cards, performance based tasks, teaching videos, and activities that were based on different levels according to their data posted on the wall. As the students worked, Teacher K and the exceptional education teacher walked around to support those with additional questions. An analysis of the observation data yielded the following responses documented in Table 3 to address the specific research questions of this study.
Table 3

*Observation Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Collaboration/Teacher Efficacy</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (PreK) EE</td>
<td>Same lesson modeled</td>
<td>Off Task Students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Communication</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B (K-5) EE</td>
<td>Planning Time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C (K-2) EE</td>
<td>Team Meeting</td>
<td>Off Task Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copies of Lesson Plans Provided</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of IEPs to address concerns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (3-5) EE</td>
<td>Review of IEPs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (PreK) GE</td>
<td>Sharing of Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (K) GE</td>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (1st) GE</td>
<td>Clear Expectations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships with students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>H (2nd) GE</td>
<td>Input provided by EE teacher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-on-one instruction</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peer tutoring</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well-structured classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I (3rd) GE</td>
<td>Prepared materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small Groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands-on Activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Passionate about teaching</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organized</td>
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<tr>
<td>J (4th) GE</td>
<td>Sharing of Lesson Plans</td>
<td>Limited Planning Time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Behavior Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (5th) GE</td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtainable goals for students</td>
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</tbody>
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Exceptional Education Teacher Interviews

Teacher A. In her interview, Teacher A confirmed that she worked in the field of education for 37 years and that she has been an exceptional education teacher for the past 18 years. Teacher A verified that she is one of four National Board Certified Teachers on the staff at the school. Teacher A described her passion for working with exceptional education students. Teacher A told of how she made sure that she not only addressed the needs of her exceptional education students, but she also made sure that the general education students were assisted as needed. She described how she constantly provided encouragement and motivation to all students and celebrated students’ successes. She professed to use a variety of co-teaching strategies and she enjoyed co-teaching with many of the Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers.

Teacher A described herself as a firm believer in co-teaching strategies and feels that they are effective if teachers are willing to share and learn from each other. She explained that she thinks that teachers need to be willing to put the needs of the students first and that it would be helpful if individual personalities (attitudes) did not interfere with instruction. Teacher A reported she believes cooperation is a must, and the teachers that Teacher A co-teaches with seem glad that she makes herself available, not only to her exceptional needs students, but to all of the students in the general education classroom as well. When asked what were two advantages and disadvantages of inclusive classrooms, Teacher A’s eyes lit up. “One advantage is exceptional needs students develop friendships and learn to interact with their non-disabled peers. Another advantage is that students with disabilities are surrounded by communication and language skills in an inclusive classroom setting.” Her beliefs are that while there are
several disadvantages of inclusive education classrooms, one important disadvantage is that students with disabilities may not receive the differentiated instruction that they need in order to be successful. One other point that she made with reference to the disadvantages of inclusion was that some general education teachers are not receptive to students with disabilities and often worry about how it will affect their classroom test scores.

Teacher A shared that general education teachers’ fears of teaching students with disabilities can be eased simply by believing that all students are capable of learning and that students with disabilities are just students who learn differently. She indicated that if teachers have deep knowledge and understanding of their subject matter, they should be able to scaffold activities and skills into smaller segments and be able to facilitate learning in different ways. Activities were tailored to meet students where they are and move them to where they need to be. If the teacher is unable to move students to where they need to be, they should not be discouraged, but keep in mind that any level of growth is considered progress and should be celebrated. When questioned about the type and amount of support needed to create an inclusive classroom or school, Teacher A said, “Support needs to come from the entire staff of a school, especially the principal. Parents and peers also need to support the inclusive classroom. Daily support can be given by making modifications to materials and accommodations in the classroom as well as the school itself.” Teacher A suggested that when inclusion students are being assigned to a class list, especially when there are a large number of students to be included in the general education classroom, the inclusion students should be grouped together; rather than spread out to all classrooms. During this interview, she also stressed that it would be
easier for the exceptional education teacher to work with students more effectively and that they would be able to co-teach if they could spend more time in one classroom rather than going into one classroom for 30 minutes or an hour each day. This, in turn leaves the exceptional needs students and general education teacher without that additional support for most of the day.

**Teacher B.** Teacher B has been teaching special education for eight years and has also worked as a middle school inclusion and a self-contained teacher in a classroom for students with mild to moderate disabilities. From many observations of Teacher B, the researcher concluded that she was an excellent teacher who is thoroughly knowledgeable of the laws that protect her exceptional education students. She made sure that each of her students got the most out of his or her experiences in the general education classrooms. Her strengths lie in her ability to verbally communicate with the general education teachers to make sure that activities that are planned for students are carried out effectively. Unlike Teacher A, Teacher B is not as comfortable with co-teaching, but still manages to assist general education teachers with classroom instructions while inclusion students are in their classrooms.

In her opinion, co-teaching strategies between general education and exceptional education teachers have the potential to be effective, but often times they are ineffective. They are largely ineffective because it takes time and effective planning for co-teaching to work effectively. "In my experiences, I have witnessed that the time and effort is not generally put into creating lessons and utilizing special education teachers as an equal educator in the inclusion classroom. The special education teacher usually functions as a helping hand, rather than a primary educator in the general education classroom.
environment,” Teacher B said. She works hard at making sure that both she and the general education teacher work collectively to pull resources that will meet the individual needs of her students, while still focusing on the skills to be met in the classroom. This exceptional education teacher indicated that the placing of inclusion students on a class list should generally be done based on the needs of the students, or in a random fashion when possible. In some instances, students should be placed in a specific classroom because of learning styles, interests, etc. However, it should never be based on the general education teacher’s preference or if the teachers are able to accommodate the needs of the students properly.

Teacher B is firm in her belief that two of the most important advantages of inclusive education classrooms are students having the opportunity to study and learn the same materials as their general education peers with accommodations and modifications, and students having an opportunity to obtain social skills without having to be removed from the general education classroom. She says, “Two disadvantages of inclusion are teachers in the general education setting being improperly trained in the best practices for teaching students with disabilities, and exceptional education students being made to feel uncomfortable by their general education peers.”

When asked, “What is the best way to address the apprehensions and fears that general education teachers have about teaching students with disabilities?” Teacher B stressed the importance of better preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities. She believed that this barrier could be addressed through district provided professional development. Teacher B felt that various types of support for personnel can be utilized to make the inclusion classroom environments more conducive for learning for students
with disabilities. Paraprofessionals can be provided to assist teachers with implementing the accommodations and modifications. She also mentioned that effective planning and collaboration should be done among all service providers so that the students can obtain maximum benefits from inclusion. According to Teacher B, teachers should be trained on how to include students with disabilities in the classroom seamlessly. Some teachers even take it upon themselves to take courses that they feel will directly assist them in providing the best possible educational experience for the students that they work with. This teacher also feels that support should be given on an “as needed” basis, based on the individual needs of students. The support can range from daily supports to just monitoring.

**Teacher C.** Teacher C is a veteran teacher with over 18 years of teaching experience. For the past seven years, she has been an exceptional education teacher. As a very soft-spoken teacher, and one whom has never been heard to raise her voice, she has a special way of getting her students to do what she needs them to do. This is a prime example of how it takes a great deal of patience to work with exceptional education students. As a former general education teacher, she knows all too well many of the fears that general education teachers have about teaching exceptional education students.

Teacher C is certain that if general education teachers are provided with adequate training on how to include special needs students in the general education classroom and provide these students with the appropriate accommodations and modifications so that they will be successful in the academic curriculum, many benchmark gaps and barriers to adequate education would be closed.
According to Teacher C, the exceptional education teacher should provide the general education teacher with extra support inside the general education classroom during core subject instructional time. General education teachers of students with behavioral disabilities would benefit greatly from training on how to manage students with emotional and/or behavioral issues. Teacher C feels that support should be offered to these teachers, depending on the severity of the disability, daily or weekly. She supports this statement by indicating how inclusive schools need to have enough exceptional education teachers to support and adequately service the number of students with disabilities within the general education classrooms.

Teacher C says that as a general education teacher, she embraced the different learning styles that her students possessed. Now, as an exceptional education teacher, she sees an even greater need for using this to address students’ varied learning styles. Differentiated instruction should be provided in classrooms of students with disabilities. As a means of collaboration, general education teachers and exceptional education teacher should attend trainings concerning students with disabilities together. An inclusive classroom, according to this participant, can also include co-teaching strategies. Teacher C rated co-teaching strategies as effective because both the general education and exceptional education teachers facilitate learning and impact knowledge. She sees co-teaching as beneficial and effective because it allows for increased time for individualized attention of a student and supervision of low achieving students.

According to Teacher C, one advantage of inclusive education is socialization of the special needs student with his or her age-appropriate peers. Another advantage, she says, is students with disabilities being exposed to the full curriculum, along with
academic support with benefit all learners. On the other hand, Teacher C believes that one disadvantage of inclusive education is lack of teacher training. General education teachers may not have the necessary specialized training to address the needs of students with disabilities. Another disadvantage that she mentioned was behavioral concerns. Depending on the nature of the child’s disability, it can affect the way the student behaves, therefore affecting the learning environment. General education teachers attempting to teach in such an environment could become easily frustrated. It is because of behavioral outbursts such as this that general education students miss out on valuable instructional time. As a precaution, careful considerations should be made before exceptional education students should be assigned to a class list. These students’ least restrictive environments should be taken into consideration, and the ones with behavioral disabilities should not all be placed on one class list.

**Teacher D.** Eight of the 10 total years that Teacher D has been teaching, she has worked with exceptional education. “I have always had a passion for working with individuals with special needs,” says Teacher D. “I love helping people and being able to see their growth.” Teacher D has only been a teacher at the school for two years, but brings a wealth of experience to the forefront. She believed that, while there are many advantages to inclusive education classrooms, two of the most pressing issues were that inclusion makes for greater exposure to academic activities and it allows for exceptional education students to experience increased social interactions with non-disabled peers. She believed that support should be offered daily for these students and monthly for the teachers. Ongoing support and support from exceptional education teachers could greatly assist general education teachers, and ease some of the anxiety caused by the fears that
these teachers have about teaching students with disabilities. Teacher D believed that these teachers should attend on-going inclusion training with exceptional education teachers to stay abreast of the trends, changes, and issues in and with exceptional education.

Co-teaching was an area of education that Teacher D felt could be effective if it is executed properly. The exceptional education teacher, according to Teacher D, should be used as support for the teacher. For example, both teachers should present the objectives using their own teaching strategies. “The general education teacher may present the information at a higher level, where as the exceptional education teacher can present the information at a lower level in order for the struggling learners to grasp the concepts and become more fluent,” said Teacher D. She also noted that exceptional education students should be assigned to a class list based on their least restrictive environment.

In Teacher D’s opinion, she is firm in her beliefs that the disadvantages of inclusive classrooms were lack of appropriate inclusion training for teachers, and issues in scheduling. Scheduling issues, she said, arise when students are in several different classrooms which make it more difficult for the inclusion teacher to service students. The first issue was addressed by teacher collaborations, and professional development for general education teachers. The second issue was resolved by working out schedules to where the exceptional education teacher has several students of hers in one class at a time.
General Education Teacher Interviews

Teacher E – PreKindergarten. Teacher E had been teaching at the school for fifteen years, but has been teaching for twenty-six years. She has team taught with three exceptional education teachers at three different schools. She says that she has had inclusion students in all grades that she has taught. “Teaching, was an ego-boost. I give it all I have every day and go home feeling accomplished. I love the excitement of the children when they “get it” and love the joy that comes when they have completed a project, all by themselves. I love the routine and structure of their school day and when they confidently know what happened next,” says Teacher E. She became very close to many of her parents and always had some special students who return to visit her years later. She loves teaching students, whether they are general education students or exceptional education students. She says, “When disabled students are in the classroom, they are simply part of the group; they are ‘my children’.” Teacher E, of course has had a plethora of experiences with many different students, but she does remember her very first experience with a special needs student. She was teaching in a private preschool during her first year out of college. She claims to have had a student with a severe, speech impairment. At that time, there was no exceptional education class at the school.

The major difference between Teacher E’s first inclusion experience and her experiences in more recent years was that she is able to collaborate and co-teach with an exceptional education teacher when necessary. She also believes that many of the inclusion students from years ago would now be in self-contained classrooms if assistance that is available now, was available then. The memory of her first experience working with an inclusion student was brought back to her when she was faced with the
same situation this year. This particular student also has a developmental delay. According to Teacher E, she was functioning at the same academic level as many of her general education peers. At this point, she was just as successful as they are. Teacher E used the same strategies with all students. While each one learns differently, she tried to teach the same skills in several different ways each day. She included auditory, tactile, visual, and sensory motor means to teach new skills. Teacher E was fully aware that what works for one student may or may not work for another.

There is more attention paid to their abilities and/or limitation as they refer to placement, so they are more likely to be successful in the classroom. Teacher E stated that she feels that not all teachers are eager to have inclusion students, so when placing them, this should be considered. Class structure was also important. All children need structure and routines. “Being unorganized can lead to chaos in a classroom. Teacher E noted that teachers of inclusion students must be adaptable, flexible, and open to new ideas.

**Teacher F – Kindergarten.** A general education teacher for nearly 20 years, Teacher F could provide a long list of memorable experiences, enough to write a book on. She had worked with exceptional education students over the years; some students have been with her class the entire day, while some only came for specific time periods. She was a Kindergarten teacher who worked at the school for 12 years. Teacher F, in a casual conversation told the researcher that she really enjoyed working with younger aged children. One thing that inspired and motivated her was to see students learn, and compare the progress that they make from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. “At the beginning of the year,” Teacher F said, “Many of the little ones
do not know how to hold a pencil or write anything at all on a page. Then to look at the beautiful writing and work as the year progresses is truly amazing."

Teacher F believed that it was important to include children with disabilities in the general education classroom. She says that these children, although they may have a disability, are able to learn and “pick up” skills and behaviors, simply from being around and working with the children in the general education classroom daily. Teacher F remained neutral in her views about whether there should be a specific class list for inclusive students. As a welcoming and inviting teacher, she had nothing against working with inclusive education students. She mentioned that she had 26 students in her classroom and none have an exceptional education ruling. She did, however, have a student that she was working with that she had requested to be observed for a possible exceptional education referral and testing. The time that he had been in her room, he had made friends with everyone and his classmates nurture him and “look after” him. Teacher F felt that more children are being fully included now, as compared to when “inclusion” first started. She indicated that there is also much more paperwork that has to be completed and kept on file for these children. Teacher F found that when working with inclusion students, it was helpful to use hands-on activities, listening center activities, and computer activities.

As Teacher F recalled her first experience with an exceptional education student, she says that she did not remember the exact date or year, but remembered that she had an autistic student. His parents were skeptical about him being mainstreamed into her classroom. They did not realize the potential that their son had. They did not think that mainstreaming him was such a good idea. After he adapted to his new setting, he was a
“leader” in the classroom. Initially, he was extremely isolated and any little thing would stress him out. He would not join in for the morning routine, or talk very much at all. Within a few weeks, this student was taking the pointer from Teacher F, pointing to, and reading all of the sight words on the word wall, doing the alphabet rap, and telling his peers to pay attention. When the student’s mother came in and witnessed what he was doing, she broke down crying and claimed it to be a miracle. Teacher F said that she still keeps in touch with his family. During the time that this particular student was in her class, the exceptional education teacher would, initially, stay in the room. As he began to make more progress, her visits became far and few between. She would continue to monitor his progress throughout the year, and would discuss his progress and goals to implement.

**Teacher G – First Grade.** Teacher G, a spunky, bubbly, and energetic first grade teacher, had been working at the school for seven years. She taught at a three and four year old preschool for seven years, and had worked in the public school sector for ten years. Teacher G had worked with exceptional education students, but felt that her experience was limited in working with severe cases. Teacher G had a wonderful rapport with her students, and it takes a lot to get her really “worked up”. She had a very easy-going spirit, and worked well with most of her students. When she taught her students, she strived to fill their little minds with as much knowledge as possible. In her words, “I want every student to feel like they can succeed. I enjoy teaching because I feel like I can reach each student in spite of their cultural background.” Teacher G took pride in her belief that students with disabilities that are included in the general education classroom benefit from the socialization with other students. She also felt that they may not be able
to grasp the concept of every lesson taught, but they get something out of it. However, students with severe disabilities may not benefit entirely from being in a general education classroom setting all day.

In her first experience with exceptional education students, Teacher G remembered that tests were given to this group outside of the classroom by an exceptional education teacher and daily work was modified. During this time, the exceptional education teachers pulled students for common weekly assessments and sat by them throughout the day in her general education classroom. It may not have been the same teacher every time. The exceptional education teachers rotated and took turns sitting with the students throughout the day. They kept these students on task and assisted them as needed during Teacher G’s instructional lessons.

Teacher G indicated that inclusive education had changed in the aspect that she felt that she had limited assistance with exceptional education teachers during her instructional lessons. She described how she worked one on one with her exceptional education students and utilized peer tutoring to assist in working with these students in her classroom. This year, Teacher G was working with an exceptional education student who was being retained from last school year. She said that he was doing really well and had attained a wealth of knowledge from the concepts and skills being taught. He made better grades than some of her general education students. While she had no problem working with exceptional education students who had been mainstreamed into the general education program, she did not think that too many inclusion students should be assigned to one class. If more assistance was available, it may be more beneficial for some of the exceptional needs students. However, having limited resources along with
too many exceptional education students would add more of a strain on an already overloaded general education teacher. Teacher G also stated that the severity of student disabilities should be taken into consideration when placing exceptional education students. Placements should be conducted on a case by case basis.

**Teacher H – Second Grade.** One of the most devoted educators on staff at the school is Teacher H. She is an excellent, second grade, general education teacher. This soft spoken teacher used multiple techniques and strategies, to which the other teachers were amazed, and her team members had adopted. She was a staff leader, who had taken on leadership roles as team leader, lead teacher, and the school’s teacher of the year. Teacher H was very humble and her devotion to education went above and beyond the classroom as a representative for the local, state, and national teachers’ association. As a representative of a teacher organization, Teacher H was a “stickler” for following rules and abiding by the education laws. She had been in the field of education for 14 years, and had been working at the school for five years. She had experienced working with exceptional education students every year that she had been teaching. There were some students that she had worked with who had been mainstreamed into her classroom for lunch, recess, and special classes and activities. Teacher H enjoyed working with exceptional needs students because it allowed her to interact with a population that enabled her to model diversity in her regular classroom setting and witness the strengths that this group of students had.

Teacher H stated that her first experience working with an exceptional education student was a very challenging one. She was teaching second grade and had a student in her general education class whom had been sexually molested. This student had frequent
outburst and her strange behavior alluded to underlying issues that she was struggling with. No one had mentioned that aside of her academic weakness; this student was struggling with emotional issues as well. While Teacher H felt that exceptional education students should be randomly assigned to general education classrooms, the general education teacher should be fully aware of any issues that may interfere with a student’s learning, growth, and development in the general education classroom. In the situation that Teacher H experienced, she said that the exceptional education teacher visited the classroom regularly and supplied materials, but did not disclose that the student may display uncontrollable behaviors. She had to experience this as she began working with the student. Teacher H served exceptional education students who had behavior issues. It was because of her prior experiences in working with students with behavioral issues and how they related to inclusion that she is better prepared to address these issues. She also believed that small group instruction and working with manipulatives were great teaching techniques for exception education inclusion students.

**Teacher I – Third Grade.** Teacher I was an exceptionally organized, self-motivated, and driven teacher. She had been in education for ten years and had taught in both, elementary and secondary settings. In both areas, she had been privileged enough to work in an inclusive setting. She was also a certified tutor, who had worked many years at Sylvan Learning Center, part-time, as an academic reading and writing tutor. Teacher I had a very strong language background and collaborated well, not only with her teammates, but with all staff members as well. Whenever one entered her classroom, the class was engaged and enthusiastic about learning. Teacher I adapted well to change, and did what was asked of her all the time. She embraced the opportunity to work with
students of all ability levels. Knowing that working with exceptional students in a general education setting allowed these students to feel just as normal as their peers, regardless of their disabilities, made her proud to service them.

Teacher I remembered her first experience working with exceptional education inclusive students. She considered this to be one of the most profound, yet, most memorable experiences with an exceptional education student. According to Teacher I, she was in her second year as second grade teacher, and was apprehensive before the school year started that she would have a certain exceptional education student in her classroom. “I had seen him on the playground several times and he would stay on the playground and refuse to come in with his class. He was very defiant and could not communicate well with his peers or teachers. I did not want that problem in my classroom,” said Teacher I. She spoke with the exceptional education teachers, who were very helpful in assisting her. They encouraged her and reassured her that everything would work out. They made themselves available for support. What Teacher I did not know was that she would learn to love this student, take special measures to work with him, and leave a lasting impression on him. She learned to communicate with him, even though as a second grader, his mental capacity was that of a 36 month old. Then there came a time where this student had to leave the school and move to another school which would be able to better accommodate his disabilities. No one was happy about this transition. Teacher I never looked at exceptional education students the same again.

The situation that Teacher I faced changed her opinions and mindset about working with exceptional needs students. “I loved working with exceptional education students in an inclusive setting and had no problem tending to their needs and
accommodations. I tried to be sensitive to their needs, but also allowed them as much independence as possible in the general education setting," says Teacher I. She believed that using the “buddy system”, peer tutoring, close proximity, repeating instructions using varied levels of vocabulary, amending activities, and allowing more time for assignments were all useful and effective teaching strategies for working with students in an inclusive classroom setting.

This year, unfortunately, Teacher I was not working with any inclusion students, does believe that when assigning exceptional education student to general education classrooms, they should be paired with a teacher who is sensitive to, or understanding of their individual needs. Teachers, both general and exceptional education, should be mindful that these students should be learning in their least restrictive environment.

Teacher J – Fourth Grade. One of the behavioral intervention teachers on staff at the school is Teacher J. Her ability to use close proximity and teacher/student time to redirect and mold students was intriguing. She had unique and eccentric teaching methods and strategies that seem to grasp and keep the attention of her fourth grade students. Surprisingly, this teacher had only been in the field of education for seven years. She truly had a way with her students. Teacher J had worked with exceptional education students in the areas of academics, tutoring, and social skills. She enjoyed instructional time with students with disabilities. She said, “Sometimes she feels as if, not only do the exceptional education students benefit from tailored assignments, but general education students as well. If a general education teacher takes time to address problematic issues for the exceptional education student, struggling general education students may catch on as well.
In recalling her first inclusive education experience, Teacher J described an experience from her first year as a teacher. She was in a second grade classroom and her student had an emotional disability. The exceptional education teacher had an individualized education program plan (IEP) in place and established a working schedule for the student. It was because of consistently working with exceptional education students and exceptional education teachers that Teacher J easily made inclusive students feel like a part of the general instruction process. She made sure to call on them to respond to questions that she felt were at a level that was comfortable for them to respond to. This allowed the students to feel at ease and normal in a general setting. The students were, then, more apt to completing modified class work.

Teacher J was not quite sure if the inclusive education program had changed so much over the years; rather, it was more enforced and supported than at the time of her first encounter with an exceptional education case. She was serving students with emotional disabilities, learning disabilities (borderline mental retardation), and hearing impaired disabilities. In her opinion, inclusive students should not be evenly disbursed among class lists for fairness only, but based on the student’s challenges and teacher’s level of education and professional knowledge. Personality should also be a weighing factor in exceptional education student placement.

**Teacher K – Fifth Grade.** Teacher K was a firm, but fair teacher who was a former behavior intervention teacher always had an orderly classroom. Her students showed her an immeasurable amount of respect, and knew that her expectations for each of them were high. This veteran teacher had been in education for 26 years; 10 of those years were spent working with children who were medically diagnosed as having
Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She had been employed at the school for 16 years.

Teacher K loved and enjoyed teaching. She got gratification simply seeing children learn. Her first experience with special education inclusive students was when she was hired as a limited service instructor over 25 years ago. At that time, exceptional education students were resourced to general education classes for lunch, physical education, music, and art. The exceptional education teacher did assist with the students. The students, then, only spent about 20% of their time in a general education class, especially those students with an emotional ruling indicated on their IEP.

An analysis of the interview data yielded the following responses documented in Table 4 to address the specific research questions of this study.
Table 4

*Interview Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Collaboration/Teacher Efficacy</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (PreK) EE</td>
<td>Willing to share and learn from others</td>
<td>Not receptive to SWD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put student needs first and personal aside</td>
<td>Student Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily support</td>
<td>SWD in one classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop friendships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication and Language Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (K-5) EE</td>
<td>Support as needed depending on disability</td>
<td>Not properly trained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Based on student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trained in best practices for SWD</td>
<td>Randomly placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (K-2) EE</td>
<td>Daily Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to share and learn from others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization (interact with peers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (3-5) EE</td>
<td>Support on various disabilities</td>
<td>Not properly trained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Scheduling issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LRE Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E (PreK) GE</td>
<td>Cooperation between teachers</td>
<td>Class Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily Routine for SWD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to share and learn from others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (K) GE</td>
<td>Both teachers have a deep understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adequate training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G (1st) GE</td>
<td>Support as needed depending on IEP</td>
<td>SWD in one class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization (interact with peers)</td>
<td>LRE Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H (2nd) GE</td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Randomly placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (3rd) GE</td>
<td>Sharing of strategies and lesson plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J (4th) GE</td>
<td>Modified Assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K (5th) GE</td>
<td>Sharing experiences and skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review of Documents

Insight into this partnership between the general and exceptional education teachers was gained through a review of written documents utilized during team meetings and in the classroom. The documents reviewed were lesson plans and IEPs. General education teachers had the task to write lesson plans weekly and exceptional education teachers had the task to write IEPs annually. General education teachers used curriculum documents and data to discuss which standards were taught and used to write weekly lesson plans. On the other hand, the exceptional education teacher used Common Core Standards, various pieces of data, and other resources to write the annual IEP for students with disabilities.

During grade level team meetings, the exceptional education teacher was able to provide valuable information about the exceptional education students as well as the general education students they had been working with during the time spent inside and outside the classroom. Data was also reviewed to track the student’s progress on various assessments as well as their grades. This collaboration between the general education and the exceptional education teacher was the perfect time for them to discuss different strategies that maybe successful with both general and exceptional education students as it relates to lesson plans and IEPs.

Lesson Plans

One example of how the general education teacher collaborated with the exceptional education teacher was by reviewing and sharing ideas on weekly lesson plans. Often times exceptional education teachers assisted students with disabilities in isolation while they were in the classroom. However, with the sharing of decisions based
on the students’ needs, this was the perfect opportunity for both teachers to work as a team and help the whole class to be successful. Lesson plans included standards taught for the week using the Madeline Hunter Format as well as small group instruction that differentiated instruction for the entire class. For example, the exceptional education teacher will teach a small group of students while the general education teacher concentrated on the rest of the class. From reviewing lesson plans together, the teachers collaborated more about specific differentiated instruction for those students who received interventions. The differentiated instruction for the students was based on data in order to meet the needs of all students and the general and exceptional education students worked with both teachers during small group instruction.

Collaboration among Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher F, Teacher G, and Teacher H had been observed specifically during team meetings utilizing lesson plans. During this time, they came together to discuss upcoming standards and ways in which those standards were taught in efforts to obtain the best outcomes. In some cases, Teacher F took the lead during team meetings by opening discussions relevant to upcoming standards and how the teacher’s edition explained how those standards were addressed. Teacher F was considerate and receptive of students with disabilities when leading and participating in team meetings constantly questioning other teachers as well as herself on whether certain teaching strategies and activities met the needs of all learners. She listened carefully as other teachers spoke about their experiences with students with disabilities and used the information as a learning tool to better what is done in the classroom.
Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher G, and Teacher H provided support and ideas as well. Teacher B had much knowledge as it related to exceptional educational students and how they learned. She expressed the need for creativity and presumed the importance of mobility in the classroom for all learners. Since attention can be an issue, especially with her students, she advised teachers to move around and stand closely to students during instruction. She concluded by telling her team in one meeting to keep it simple with students with disabilities by not overloading them with too much information. She stated the importance of knowing all students, especially those with disabilities. She provided an example of creating anchor charts reminding teachers to use vivid colors with limited information because too much will frustrate exceptional education students. Lastly, she reminded her team to be overly dramatic when reading and allow those students opportunities for movement throughout the day.

Teacher C believed that all activities should provide engagement as she felt that it would decrease and possibly eliminate behavior concerns during instruction. Additionally, Teacher C reiterated the need of assignment modification for students with disabilities because if the level of work was too difficult, it created behavior concerns as well. Teacher G was able to provide explicit ways in which standards were taught; however, she expediently reminded other teachers that she was learning more and more about students with disabilities and felt like the novice teacher out of the group even though she had taught several years. On the other hand, she provided input and her ideas where she could. She stated that she wanted all of her students to be successful and did all that she could to provide support to them by utilizing peer-tutoring and one-on-one instruction.
Also, teachers discussed how standards were taught in previous years along with students’ successes. In some cases, teachers utilized online resources to determine alternative methods for teaching standards and used what is best for their students. Along with determining the best mode of instruction to teach standards, Teacher C and Teacher G shared ideas about activities that fit the needs of their learners. Teacher C and Teacher H discussed the need to differentiate instruction especially when teaching students with disabilities. Teacher H had a range of strategies in her educationally tool belt for students with disabilities as she worked with exceptional education students since her beginning years as an educator. Moreover, they used planning times as an opportunity to reflect on past planning sessions and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of lesson plan implementation.

In meetings, Teacher H stressed the importance of teachers knowing their students and believed this would benefit when creating lessons. She gave many past experiences during team meetings that were used to help with decision-making regarding behavior and instruction for all students. All teachers engaged in reflective dialogue to determine whether the decisions made about instruction were those that provided intended outcomes and met the needs of each of their students. They discussed possible misconceptions of students and tried to design lessons to prevent this from occurring. Through collaboration among Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher F, Teacher G, and Teacher H, an urgent sense of responsibility had been observed. All teachers continuously reflected on their instructional practices to determine their effectiveness. Also, their joint effort shifted to a culture of increased focus on achievement and high expectations. Lastly, all teachers
believed through collaboration, they developed more confidence in themselves and knew they had one another’s support in decision-making regarding instructional practices.

**Individualized Educational Program**

Another example of how the exceptional education teacher collaborated with the general education teacher was through the use of data from several sources to write an IEP for students with disabilities. The exceptional education teacher used Common Core Standards, various pieces of data, and other resources to write the annual IEP for students with disabilities. An IEP is an acronym for Individualized Educational Program. It is a document that must be followed when providing services to exceptional education students. The IEP provided the general education and other related service providers with a brief snapshot of the student’s present level of academic achievement and functional performance.

The PLAAFP consisted of each exceptional education student’s strengths, weakness, the way he or she learned best and their preferences along with the list of what sources were used to collect the data used to write the IEP. Each IEP explained how the student’s disability affects or might affect his or her being included in the general education environment. A list of accommodations and modifications were provided for the general education teacher to use in the general education classroom and during state testing. The IEP was provided to the general education teachers and other related service providers to supply the exceptional education student with an opportunity to participate in the general education curriculum.

Teacher A and Teacher E were observed reviewing an IEP for one of the students during a pre-planning IEP meeting. This gave them the opportunity to reflect specifically
on how well students performed on the goals that were set before the annual IEP meeting was held with the parent. Teacher A referred to a list of modifications that were suggested for the student to be implemented within the classroom. She discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the student by reviewing the report cards and other data sources. According to the report card, Teacher A noticed that the student needed improvement in Reading. Understanding that students with disabilities have difficulty obtaining new information, Teacher A never placed the blame on the student, she attributed their performance to how well the instruction was delivered. She also collaborated with Teacher E about how the modifications were being utilized in the classroom to enhance instruction for this student.

Teacher E reviewed the student’s performance in the classroom; however, her thoughts were not as organized as Teacher A’s discussion. Her main focus was the student did not perform well on certain standards. She stated the various ways in which she attempted to deliver the information, but the fact still remained that the student was unsuccessful. Teacher A politely interjected from time to time asking questions relative to instruction to gain an understanding on why students were not successful. Teacher A suggested the following modifications must be implemented in the classroom: reduced work, small groups, and retest if failure. For example, by differentiating instruction especially for comprehension, Teacher A believed that would increase the student’s understanding. She stated that small group instruction was more engaging for early learners as it holds their attention longer than trying to teach comprehension whole group. Teacher A believed that small group instruction gives teachers the opportunity to scaffold learning opportunities and opens the door for teachers to facilitate learning in different
ways. Teacher A was very certain that if Teacher E applied the suggested strategies that Teacher E’s student would be successful. Additionally, Teacher A suggested that early learners require much affirmation, encouragement and motivation. A decision between Teacher A and Teacher E was made to provide more time for tutorial for this student to receive one-on-one instruction. This was documented on the student’s IEP and the parent attended the meeting to discuss the change.

Case Analysis: Discussion of Research Questions

The overall purpose of this study was to determine whether or not general education and exceptional education teachers working together had an impact on the inclusion process. These two groups of teachers collaborated to address challenges that students meet in the general educational setting. Their goal was to provide the best possible learning experience for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. While this study only took into account the challenges and successes of one school, in one school district, it is a glimpse of what other teachers, general and exceptional education are facing in inclusive settings. In order to determine if shared decision making and collaboration has an impact on inclusion, this case study was driven by the following two research questions:

1. How does shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective inclusion practices?

2. How does a lack of shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers lead to ineffective inclusion practices and challenges?
Research Question 1: Effective Inclusion Practices

All 11 of the teachers included in the case study agreed that as the school leader, the principal is the fixture of the academic process of all students. Teacher A, an exceptional education teacher, was the first to say, “Support needs to come from the entire staff of a school, especially the principal.” The school leader has the responsibility of providing support for all teachers and students. It is the principal’s responsibility to make sure that the inclusion process is effective and providing all that it is supposed to for each student. The school leader sets the tone for all other individuals in the building. The teachers further agreed that because the school leader is highly motivational, it encouraged them to follow suit. Teacher B was firm in her belief that two of the most important advantages of having students with disabilities in the general education classroom allowed them the opportunity to study and learn the same materials as their general education peers with accommodations and modifications. They also have an opportunity to obtain social skills without having to be removed from the general education classroom.

Teacher C was certain that if general education teachers are provided with adequate training on how to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom and provide these students with the appropriate accommodations and modifications then many benchmark gaps and barriers to adequate education would be closed. According to Teacher C, the exceptional education teacher should provide the general education teacher with extra support inside the general education classroom during core subject instructional time. General education teachers of students with behavioral disabilities would benefit greatly from training on how to manage students
with emotional and/or behavioral issues. Teacher C felt that support should be offered to these teachers, depending on the severity of the disability, daily or weekly. She supported this statement by indicating how schools need to have enough exceptional education teachers to support and adequately service the number of students with disabilities within the general education classrooms.

Teacher I believed that using the buddy system, peer tutoring, close proximity, repeating instructions using varied levels of vocabulary, amending activities, and allowing more time for assignments are all useful and effective teaching strategies for working with students in an inclusive classroom setting. Teacher I and the exceptional education teacher discussed the agenda. Both teachers should know the material and be prepared to teach the class as if they were teaching independently. Both teachers have a group during the small group stations. When asked, “What is the best way to address the fears that general education teachers have about teaching students with disabilities?” Teacher B stressed the importance of better preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities. She believes that this challenge could be addressed through professional development. Teacher B feels that various types of support for personnel can be utilized to make the inclusion classroom environments more conducive for learning for students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals can be provided training to assist teachers with implementing the accommodations and modifications. She also mentioned that effective planning and collaboration should be done among all service providers so that the students can obtain maximum benefits from inclusion.

The school leader’s support is essential in providing time and resources for training. Teachers desired training on how to include students with disabilities in the
classroom seamlessly. Some teachers even take it upon themselves to take courses that they feel will directly assist them in providing the best possible educational experience for the students who they work with. She also felt that support should be given on an as needed basis, based on the individual needs of students, ranging from daily supports to just monitoring. While observing Teacher H teaching Math to the students, the exceptional education teacher provided input. She praised the students for performing well. Teacher H and the exceptional education teacher provided support to the students by utilizing peer-tutoring and one-on-one instruction. It was evident that Teacher H and the exceptional education teacher had discussed the need to differentiate instruction especially when teaching students with disabilities. Both teachers had a range of strategies for students with disabilities as they worked to make sure that all students were successful.

Co-teaching is an area of education that Teacher D felt could be effective if it is executed properly. The exceptional education teacher should be used as support for the teacher. For example, both teachers could present the objectives using their own teaching strategies. The general education teacher may present the information at a higher level, whereas the exceptional education teacher can present the information at a lower level in order for the struggling learners to grasp the concepts and become more fluent. By collaborating, the general education and exceptional education teachers work together for the purpose of improving student achievement. Most of the teachers agree that having the support of the exceptional education teacher in the general education classroom, not only helps the inclusion students, but the teacher as well. The teacher has an opportunity to
learn how the exceptional education teacher differentiates instruction to meet the needs of the exceptional education student.

**Research Question 2: Ineffective Inclusion Practices**

This question allowed the researcher to view the beliefs of both the general and exceptional education teachers. The research revealed that one roadblock to effective inclusion was insufficient knowledge. Too many general education teachers do not know how to deal with issues and challenges that exceptional education students have. Of the exceptional education teachers, 75% agreed that adequate training is necessary in order for general education teachers to effectively teach in an inclusive setting. Teacher D indicated that it might be beneficial for general education teachers to attend on-going inclusion training with exceptional education teachers in order to stay aware of the trends, changes, and issues with exceptional education. She also mentioned that these training sessions could also be a way to ease general education teachers’ anxiety about working with students with disabilities.

Teacher A mentioned that many teachers have the preconceived notion that exceptional education students send their standardized test scores plummeting. She believed that general education teachers adopted the mentality that all students are capable of learning, but learn differently. These teachers got into the habit of differentiating instruction to meet the various needs of these students. Teacher C believed that one disadvantage of inclusive education was lack of teacher training. General education teachers may not have had the necessary specialized training to address the needs of students with disabilities. Another disadvantage she mentioned was behavioral concerns. Depending on the nature of the child’s disability, it affected the way the student
behaved, therefore, affecting the learning environment. General education teachers attempted to teach in such an environment that could become easily frustrated. It was because of behavioral outbursts such as this that general education students missed out on valuable instructional time. As a precaution, careful considerations were made before exceptional education students were assigned to a class list.

While Teacher G had no problem working with exceptional education students who have been mainstreamed into the general education program, she did not think that too many inclusion students should be assigned to one class. If more assistance were available, it might be more beneficial for some of the exceptional education students. However, having limited resources along with too many exceptional education students added more of a strain on an already overloaded general education teacher. These students’ least restrictive environments should be taken into consideration, and the students with behavioral disabilities should not all be placed on one class list.

Another issue that was mentioned was exceptional education students feeling isolated in the general education setting. Teacher B noted that two disadvantages of inclusion are teachers in the general education setting being improperly trained in the best practices for teaching students with disabilities, and exceptional education students being made to feel uncomfortable by their general education peers. As previously mentioned, some teachers had the habit of prejudging students, and if the teacher possessed this type of mentality, other students treated exceptional education students differently as well. All students felt welcome in the learning environment. One of the main goals of inclusion was for students to learn in an environment that had as few restrictions as possible.
Some general education teachers believed many of the same issues to be true. Teacher G indicated that she believed that “a disconnect” exists in the inclusion process because she had limited assistance with exceptional education teachers during instructional lessons. One major concern was that the general education teacher should be made aware of any behavior, medical, or academic concerns that an exceptional education student might have before he or she enters the inclusion classroom. This allows the teacher to become better prepared and to plan effectively for the student. Teacher I believed that students should be paired with teachers who are sensitive to, or understanding of, their individualized needs. Of the eleven teachers interviewed, only one believed that no more than two exceptional education students should be placed in the same general education classroom. Teacher E stated that she felt that not all teachers are eager to have inclusion students, so when placing them, this should be considered. In Teacher J’s opinion, exceptional education students should not be evenly disbursed among class lists for fairness only, but based on the student’s challenges and teacher’s level of education and professional knowledge. Personality should also be a weighing factor in exceptional education student placement. Class structure was also important. All children need structure and routines. Being unorganized leads to chaos in a classroom. General education teachers with exceptional education students in their classrooms were adaptable, flexible, and open to new ideas.

The information reported by the general and exceptional education teachers found in Table 5, demonstrates examples of how shared decision making and collaboration, positively impacts effective inclusion practices.
Table 5

*Examples of How Shared Decision Making Impacts Inclusion Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Support</strong></th>
<th>Exceptional education teachers provide daily assistance in the classroom School-wide effort including the administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modifications</strong></td>
<td>Determining which modifications work best for students in an IEP meeting Opportunity to learn and study the same curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Differentiating instruction; provided handouts; behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td>Planning time; sharing of strategies, techniques and ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

This chapter presented the findings that resulted from the research and analyses that were compiled to determine the impact that shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers had on inclusion practices. The research of this study determined that, based on the responses of the teachers, shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers had a great impact on inclusion. The teachers involved in this study engaged in meaningful relationships with each other. While the concept of collaboration is a “work-in-progress”, the teachers were confident in their ability to increase student achievement through more effective planning. Collaboration between the teachers clearly resulted in greater teacher efficacy. They were proactive about finding ways to differentiate instruction and the administrator was more supporting to teachers, and took a greater responsibility in playing an active role in the collaboration process.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter V is a presentation of the summary, conclusions, and recommendations. The purpose of this study was to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between the general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. This chapter presented the findings that resulted from the research and analyses that were compiled to determine the impact that shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers had on inclusion. The researcher was interested in finding research-based evidence to support her belief that shared decision making and collaboration have a positive effect on inclusion. The findings of this case study indicated that several teachers could greatly benefit from participating in professional learning communities and using the co-teaching strategy to increase student achievement through effective planning. The teachers are more proactive about finding ways to differentiate instruction. The research of this study determined that, based on the responses, shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers had a great impact on inclusion.
Discussion of Findings

This case study was designed to investigate the impact shared decision making and collaboration has on inclusion. The study was guided by these research questions:

1. How does shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective inclusion practices?
2. How does a lack of shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers lead to ineffective inclusion practices and challenges?

Only qualitative data was used as a determining factor for the results of this study. In order to determine whether this study was reliable and valid, the results of this study were compared with published literature and previous research findings. This case study revealed data similar to many previous studies with regard to the themes that emerged from this study.

Collaboration and Teacher Efficacy

The research indicates that the practice of inclusion is not limited to only exceptional education teachers, but it is also an opportunity for general education teachers to engage in a shared practice that has the ability to meet the instructional needs of every student in an academically diverse classroom. Some of the advantages of shared decisions and collaboration are differing strengths of professionals, general education teacher’s knowledge of the curriculum and pacing, increasing educational opportunities, the exceptional education teacher’s knowledge of differentiated instruction and individualized instruction.
The exceptional education teacher’s knowledge of strategies and techniques to enhance learning for all students is also an advantage. In a shared practice, it is the general education teacher’s role to provide expertise in the content to be taught and the methods for teaching that content, while the exceptional education teacher provides pedagogical expertise in adapting disciplinary content to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities and at-risk peers (Lenz & Dashler, 2004; McLeskey & Waldron, 2000). Just as the teachers disclosed, there must be adequate planning involved in the co-teaching relationship in order for this teaching strategy to work effectively. Co-teaching does not mean that the general education teacher should make good use of having an extra set of hands in the classroom. Neither does it involve one person teaching while the other roams around the room. The exceptional education teacher is not assuming the role of a teacher assistant. Planning is the key to a successful co-teaching relationship.

Effective co-teachers lead classrooms, jointly establish their own culture, address the challenges that may arise, share successes, and solve problems together. It is also important for teachers to be mindful of students’ varied learning styles and interests.

**Challenges**

During the interview portion of the research, teachers who were not as well welcoming of collaboration showed clear signs of fear and a lack of teacher efficacy especially among general education teachers. Also, teachers were less receptive to students with disabilities. They worried about increased student performance on standardized exams and some expressed concerns regarding classroom management and behavior. Teachers are requesting training and knowledge about characteristics of disabilities, strategies, and techniques to better instruct students with disabilities. Finding
time for general and exceptional education teachers to collaborate becomes the responsibility of the administrator. Although, this is a challenge, it would be a worthwhile endeavor that would increase opportunities for shared decision making and collaboration among the teachers.

**Conclusions**

Research has shown that teacher efficacy has a significant impact on students in the classroom, specifically on student achievement, student motivation, and student efficacy (Henson, 2001). Because teacher efficacy has been shown to be related to many positive classroom outcomes, researchers have turned toward investigating the origins of teachers’ efficacy beliefs for important insight about how to foster self-efficacy during teacher training. Studies have shown that preservice preparation experiences are a fundamental part in the development of teacher efficacy. It aids in boosting teacher confidence, teacher retention, and helps teachers develop essential knowledge and teaching skills (Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005).

This study affirms the research in the field that states that collaboration leads to greater teacher efficacy. Collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers clearly resulted in greater teacher efficacy which is the teachers that believed that they could make a positive difference. Teachers who exhibited this confidence were more likely to engage in collaboration. Those general education teachers who had the strongest desire for collaboration and worked closely with an exceptional education teacher exhibited a number of positive traits that led to more effective inclusion instruction. These traits generally fell into categories such as teamwork, good rapport with students and were passionate about learning. These traits led to the creation of
attainable goals for students because general and exceptional education teachers had a
clear understanding of the individual students’ IEP and their learning needs.

Based on an examination of materials of classroom observations and interviews,
some teachers had engaged in less collaboration. The teachers who were less willing to
collaborate tended to have classroom management issues, difficulty dealing with
behavior issues and trouble dealing with off task students. All of these issues created
challenges to effective instruction. In fact, they provided the most evidence that lack of
collaboration did lead to ineffective inclusion practices. It was evident that proper
training and professional development would help teachers who were fearful, but still
open to collaboration regarding exceptional education teachers and students.

In some instances, individual teachers expressed the feeling that at one point in
their teaching career, they had struggled with collaboration. With time and additional
training, these teachers eventually became more collaborative and felt like the
exceptional education students benefited from the increased knowledge and collaboration
of the teachers. With this in mind, it is important for educational leaders to do all that
they can through professional training and development to offer ideas and instances of
collaboration to help the students with disabilities and teachers involved in educating
them.

Research findings reveal that general and special education teachers improve their
classroom practices when working in professional learning communities. In addition,
research shows that special education teachers may play key roles in professional
learning communities. Outcomes for students improve when their teachers are part of
professional learning communities, including those who struggle the most in classrooms.
It is further believed that administrators pay a major role in supporting and sustaining PLCs and in serving as protector of a school’s shared vision and values that anchor PLC work (Blanton & Perez, 2011). Also, according to these authors, a culture of shared learning takes place in PLCs, and they provide a safe environment for teachers to tackle core issues. Teachers involved in PLCs also take greater responsibility for struggling learners, which suggests that exceptional education teachers are part of the whole-school communities in which research investigations have been conducted. In order for inclusion students to be successful, professionals are required to help students to feel comfortable in their learning community and be in their least restrictive environment. These challenges were met through consistent collaboration, and going above and beyond required staff responsibilities.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study relied on qualitative methods that had limitations. There were certain aspects of this study that may limit the generalization of the results. While the researcher employed procedures to reduce limitations, the following existed:

1. The study was limited by the short timeframe to gather data during one semester.
2. The study was limited because the entire population of teachers was not used which reduced the ability to generalize to the whole population. Nonrandom selection could affect generalization.
3. The study was conducted at one school. Therefore, the findings were generalized only to the instructional settings.
Despite limitations, this study provided insight into how general and exceptional education teachers share decisions and collaborate in order for students with disabilities to be successful.

**Recommendations**

Beyond the scope of this dissertation, more work exists. Even though this study may add to previous research, more research is needed to address how shared decisions and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers are making an impact on effective and ineffective inclusion practices. More studies on specialized professional development are needed to help general and exceptional education teachers address the specific needs and challenges teachers are facing with the inclusion of students in the general educational setting. More studies are also needed to help provide teachers with effective teaching strategies for students with disabilities. Furthermore, a study on the building level administrator being involved in the overall process of inclusion and more supportive to teachers is key factor to successful inclusion classrooms today.
REFERENCES


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Senge, P. (2000). Give me a lever long enough...and single handed I can move the world. 


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD’S LETTER
May 19, 2010

Faith R. Strong
Leadership and Foundations
Mailstop 9698

RE: IRB Study #10-093: A case study of inclusion: How does shared decision making between general education teachers, exceptional education teachers, and the building level administrator impact educational practices for assisting the inclusion process?

Dear Ms. Strong:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 5/19/2010 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please note that the MSU IRB is in the process of seeking accreditation for our human subjects protection program. As a result of these efforts, you will likely notice many changes in the IRB's policies and procedures in the coming months. These changes will be posted online at http://www.orc.msstate.edu/human/ahrop.php. The first of these changes is the implementation of an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the IRB approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. You must use copies of the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.

Please refer to your IRB number (#10-093) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at tdavis@research.msstate.edu or call 662-325-3294.

Sincerely,

Tina Davis
Compliance Coordinator

cc: Kay Brocato (Advisor)
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

Hello! This interview is designed for the purpose of gathering data to identify how shared decision making and collaboration between general and exceptional education teachers impact effective and ineffective inclusion practices. As a participant, you will be interviewed about your experiences as a general or exceptional education teacher. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

The benefit of this study is to understand how teachers are included in the decision making process with regard to inclusion practices. There are no risks or discomforts in participating in this study.

The notes and records of this research will be kept confidential. The researcher will not identify who has agreed to participate in this study. Participants’ names will not be used in the publication of this research. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants in this research.

If you have questions regarding the specifics of this study, please contact me at 601-209-0543 or the dissertation director, Dr. Eric Moyen at 662-325-0969. For additional information regarding your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact Mississippi State University Regulatory Compliance at 662-325-5220 or by email at irb@research.msstate.edu.

Thanks for your participation.

Exceptional Education Teachers

1. How long have you been in education and what experience do you have in working with exceptional education students?

2. What are two advantages and/or disadvantages of inclusive education classrooms?

3. How can general education teachers’ fears of teaching students with disabilities be eased?

4. What type of support is needed to create an inclusive classroom or school and how often should support be provided?

5. Do you rate co-teaching strategies between regular and exceptional education teachers as effective or ineffective? Why or why not?

6. What are the advantages of co-teaching? Disadvantages?

7. How do students, both regular education and exceptional education benefit from inclusion classrooms?

8. How do you feel exceptional education students should be assigned to a class list?
**General Education Teachers**

1. How long have you been in education and what experience do you have in working with exceptional education students?

2. What do you like most about teaching and how do you feel about including students with disabilities in the regular education classroom?

3. When was your first experience with exceptional education inclusion students?

4. Did the exceptional education teacher assist with these students in the classroom?

5. What are the advantages of co-teaching? Disadvantages?

6. How do students, both regular education and exceptional education benefit from inclusion classrooms?

7. How has inclusive education changed since you first encounter with inclusion?

8. What types of teaching strategies have you found to be effective with inclusion students?

9. What type of exceptional education population are you serving this year that has made this year or previous years successful with inclusive education for you and the students you serve?

10. How do you feel exceptional education students should be assigned to a class list?