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To What Extent Do General Education Elementary Teachers Perceive They Are Prepared To Teach Students With Disabilities?

Susan Fuller Elder

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To What Extent do General Education Elementary Teachers
Perceive They Are Prepared to Teach Students with Disabilities?

By Susan Fuller Elder

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Columbus State University in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2010 brought many changes to classes but it did not bring changes to the way teachers were trained. Many teacher preparation programs only required one exceptional child course for general education teachers. This dissertation analyzed the data gathered from 12 elementary, general education teachers on their perception of their preparedness to teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. The participants' perceptions of preparedness were evaluated in regards to their pre-service training and their post-service, in-service, and professional development. The interviewees responses to this study demonstrated the need for more special education classes for general education teacher candidates; more in-service on differentiation; more time for collaboration between special educators and general educators; and more education on special education law, school law, Free and Appropriate Public Education, and school policy.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

With the passage of IDEA 2004, the terms least restrictive environment and mainstreaming became almost synonymous, especially in the special education environment (Sass & Feng, 2012). With IDEA 2010, the word inclusion became an interchangeable word in the special education and regular education classroom (Shaw, Keenan, Maddaus, & Bannerjee, 2010). The goal was to blur the line between regular education and special education as teachers strived to follow the federal mandate of including students with special needs as much as possible in the regular education classroom (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). IDEA 2010 mandated the inclusion of special needs students within the general education classroom placing the responsibility of implementing inclusion mainly upon the shoulders of the general education teachers (Woolworth & Osgood, 2007). The mandate did not include training of regular education teachers to prepare for students with special needs within their general education classrooms.

Students with disabilities were a group of individuals that required accommodations or adaptations to either the curriculum or the classroom in order to attain success either academically or functionally (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). In the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, disability was further defined to include disorders in one or more of the basic cognitive processes (IDEA 2010). Disabilities affected a child's academics, cognitive thinking skills, mobility, and daily living skills. The extent disabilities have on a child ran the gamut from minor to debilitating (IDEA, 2010). The academic needs of children with disabilities were

incredibly diverse as they are able or unable to access the curriculum (Shurr & Bouck, 2013). Many regular education teachers reported feeling inadequate to handle students with disabilities within their classrooms (Nutter, 2011).

All schools that receive federal funding were required to comply with IDEA 2010 (Sass & Feng, 2012). District and school administrators, regular education, and special education teachers must provide a free, appropriate public education for all students at every public school in the United States (IDEA 2010). Additionally, educators must strive to locate and identify children that display characteristics of having special needs, either functionally or academically (Wieselthier, 2013). Through documentation, testing, and observations, teachers monitored the progress of all their students. Students that did not progress as their peers were progressing were given extra attention in order to pinpoint if more assistance or attention was needed due to a physical or cognitive issue (Shurr & Buck, 2013). Once it was determined that a child needed special support, then efforts were taken to assess those children and identify their strengths and needs (Walker, 2012).

The writers of IDEA 2010 very specifically outlined the steps teachers and administrators must take once a child was identified with special needs. Among the specifics, a team was established and met regularly to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Murdoch, Gartin & Crabtree, 2011). The IEP team, which included the student's parents and/or guardians, decided the child's needs in regards to the services of a speech language pathologist, a physical therapist, and an occupational therapist. Decisions such as if the student needed every textbook available in Braille or that the student needed a modified curriculum and adaptive textbooks were included in the IEP decision-making process (Jimenez, Mims & Browder, 2012). The IEP team also made

other decisions such as the need for a one-on-one paraprofessional in order for the child to attain success in the classroom and in the academic setting (Jimenez, Mims & Browder, 2012). The responsibility of the school district was to provide the least restrictive environment service or services at no charge to the child or the child's parents as decided by the IEP team (McLaughlin, 2010). School teachers, both general education and special education, were charged with adhering to the IEP for each child in their classrooms (Bowker, D'Angelo, Hicks & Wells, 2010). The special education teachers were trained and certified to provide strategies to help students with disabilities to attain academic success (Rosenburg & Sindelar, 2005). The general education teacher's role was to implement modifications and accommodations recommended by the IEP team to ensure the student would be successful in the regular education classroom.

Elementary general education teachers faced the increase of students with a wide range of disabilities in their classrooms. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2010 mandated more inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Elementary general education teachers must accommodate for increasing numbers of students with disabilities in their general education classrooms and are accountable for these students' academic progress. General education teachers need to be prepared for the demands of students with a range of disabilities. Teaching students with disabilities required equipping teachers with the proper strategies. Facilitators of teacher educator programs have a responsibility to ensure that their programs provide the training for general education teachers to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms. Many teacher education programs required their general education teachers to take only one exceptional child course (Franklin, 2011; Holland, Detgen, Gutekunst, Institute of Education Sciences & Regional, 2008).

Indications from researchers (Cagney, 2009; Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012; Walker, 2012) were that students' success levels were influenced by teacher attitudes. Previous studies have revealed various responses from teachers to inclusion in their classrooms (Wilkerson, 2012). Studies both at home and abroad exposed the attitudes of general educators in regards to students with disabilities in their classrooms (Alghazo, 2003; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Yianni-Coudurier, C., Darrou, C., Lenoir, P., Verrecchia, B., Assouline, B., Ledesert, B., & Baghdadli, A. (2008); Park & Chitiyo, 2011). Many of these studies revealed that the attitudes were mixed, dependent upon severity of the disability, gender of the teacher and experience of the teacher (Fink, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Elliot, 2008; Simpson, Boer-Ott, & Smith-Myles, 2003; Alghazo, Dodeen, & Algaryouti, 2003; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006).

For the purpose of this research, the researcher utilized qualitative inquiry to access the perception of general education elementary school teachers to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher employed purposive sampling to survey a select group of general education teachers with inclusive classrooms, or classrooms that include students with disabilities. The initial survey included questions such as the number of years teaching, pre-service classes, special education training, and general education course work. The teachers selected gave permission for interviews that garnered more data, such as their perceptions of teaching inclusion in their classrooms. Correlations between the demographics of the survey and the attitudes and perceptions of the teacher interviews, both positive and negative, were highlighted in this study. Both the negative and positive data provided the basis for opportunities for programs

designed to prepare general education teachers in elementary schools to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Students with disabilities were a varied group of students with a unique set of abilities and challenges (Wieselthier, 2013). As of 2013, approximately six and a half million infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities were eligible under existing federal guidelines for early intervention, special education, and related services such as speech and occupational and physical therapy due to this law (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). IDEA 2004 improved on all the prior legislation that in the past had sought to mandate the rights of children with disabilities and their parents (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2007).

According to *Brown v. the Board of Education*, education was identified as one of the most significant responsibilities of state and local governments. *Brown v. Board* brought about a renewed interest in the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that had lain dormant since the 1870s (Tissot, 2011). This reemergence led to parents seeking services for their children using the Equal Protection Clause in court cases in the 1960s and beyond. Therefore, school districts should provide an education for all students within the public education setting (Tissot, 2011). The impact on children with disabilities was that every child, through the principle of equal protection as provided via the Fourteenth Amendment, had access to an education that was free and meaningful in the least restrictive environment, with the school system providing that service or services at no charge to the child or the child's parents (Nutter, 2011; McLaughlin, 2010).

Schools should meet the needs of students with disabilities. Teachers were mandated to provide access to education for all students (U.S. Government Accounting

Office, 2012). General education teachers teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms regardless of the teacher's capabilities of teaching students with special needs. It was not known how general education teachers perceive their preparedness to teach students with disabilities. It was not known to what extent the teachers' years of experience influence their perceptions of teaching students with disabilities. It also was not known if other variables influence teachers' perceptions and if there was a relationship between all variables and factors in relation to the perceptions of general education elementary school teachers in regards to teaching students with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

Elementary general education teachers faced the difficult challenge of including students with disabilities in their classrooms. The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2010 mandated more inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom but it did not provide for the extra training teachers need to be properly equipped to teach the increasing number of students with special needs in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs for general education teachers traditionally required only one exceptional child class. The overarching goal of this study was to report the perception of preparedness of general education teachers teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. This study was to also determine if any pre-service special education classes were taken and if the teacher participated in any post-service, in-service or professional development special education classes and to what extent these classes added to the general education teachers' perceived readiness to teach students with disabilities.

Research Questions

Overarching question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

1. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?
2. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?

Conceptual Framework

In Figure One (below) the researcher illustrated the main themes of this study. For the purposes of this study, this figure outlined how the teachers' years of experience, preparations such as pre-service special education classes or in-service classes, and their experiences with inclusion and their experience with students with disabilities relate, thus presenting the overarching question, to what extent do regular education elementary teachers feel prepared to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive setting? The researcher also gathered information as to what extent the teachers' pre-service special education classes prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher also assimilated data as to the extent the teachers' in-service or professional development in special education classes prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms.

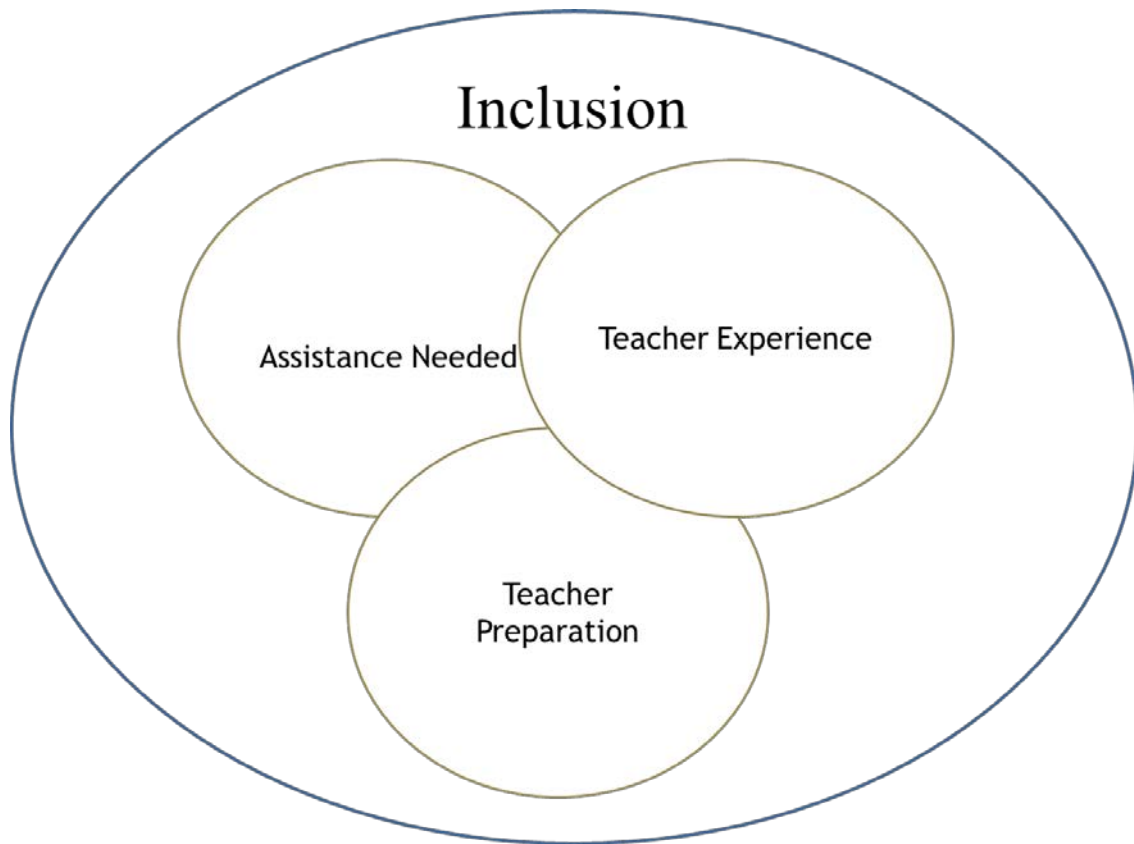


Figure 1. Intersection of Teacher Preparation, Teacher Experience, and Assistance Teaching Students with Disabilities.

Inclusion, in terms of this study, was based on Vygotsky's (1993) theories of inclusion. The teaching of children in an inclusive setting was at the heart of Vygotsky's research. Vygotsky interwove special education as the most comprehensive, inclusive, and humane practice to lay the groundwork for inclusion (Vygotsky, 1993). Vygotsky's ideas of helping children with disabilities develop socially through scientifically based, behavioral strategies forms the theoretical framework for special education (Vygotsky, 1983). Vygotsky chose to evaluate the child with special needs not by the needs of the child, but by the abilities of the child (Vygotsky, 1987.-1998). Vygotsky also focused on

the need for differentiated instruction as a means for the children with special needs to navigate the regular education classroom (Gindis, 1999).

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and social cognitive theory also played into the idea of teachers' perceptions of how well they taught students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Bandura defined the concept of believing in one's abilities to complete a task as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, one's belief in the ability to complete a task affects one's behaviors and that eventually affects the outcomes (Bandura, 1982). Bandura's theory outlined four factors that shape and influence one's self-efficacy. Those factors are: 1) mastery and vicarious experiences, 2) encouragement, 3) physiological responses, and 4) emotional responses (Bandura, 1986).

Teachers with a wide array of mastery experiences generally possessed a strong sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Teachers that witnessed seemingly overwhelming tasks performed efficiently and resulting in positive feedback also possessed a relatively high sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Bandura's studies on self-efficacy also include environmental factors such as a positive work-environment and setting high-goal standards for oneself as important indicators of high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993, 2001).

Tomlinson's theories on differentiation also worked into this study.

Differentiating instruction was an approach to teaching that advocated active planning for and attention to student differences in classrooms (Tomlinson, 2014) Differentiation meant understanding that every child had different needs and those needs necessitated custom-made instruction to meet the individual needs (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014).

Teachers provided differentiation by altering the content, process, products, and even the learning environment to help students attain success on their own level. (Tomlinson,

Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008) The use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping also made differentiation a successful approach to instruction (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

Importance of the Study

Elementary general education teachers faced the challenge of including students with disabilities in their classrooms. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2010 mandating more inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms, elementary general education teachers had to accommodate more students with disabilities. Currently there are 13 recognized special education disability categories: Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Visual Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Deaf/Blindness (IDEA, 2010).

The significance of this study was the information gained as to whether general education elementary school teachers perceived that they were prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The knowledge acquired provided insight as to whether the teachers' pre-service or post-service special education classes contributed any to these teachers' sense of preparedness. This study was important to schools and universities as it provided information to colleges and universities that contributed to better preparation of general education teachers. Examinations of the literature appeared to show teacher preparation programs have not changed to meet the needs of general education teachers working with diverse special education student populations. The study may provide information to more specifically delineate preparation needs for general education teachers.

. This information assisted the school district to see if more training was necessary for compliance with IDEA 2010. School districts and teacher preparation programs will better prepare teachers and teacher candidates thus providing students with disabilities with the strategies needed to navigate the general education classroom successfully. College and university professors needed to know if pre-service special education classes prepared general education teachers with strategies for students in inclusive classrooms. Special education directors, school superintendents, and educational policy makers needed information to elaborate the need for more specific policies and requirements for general education teacher preparation. Data from the interviews on the effectiveness of pre-service and in-service special education classes suggested avenues for better professional development.

General Procedures

Permission for this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for Columbus State University. The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of general education elementary school teachers in regards to the teachers' abilities to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined variables, such as years of experience, pre-service special education classes, in-service special education classes, or professional development preparation to teach students with disabilities. The researcher gained knowledge as to the perceived preparedness of general education elementary school teachers in teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher collected data from these teachers as to their pre-service special education classes and their post-service or in-service special education classes.

The participants in this study were general education teachers in elementary schools in various middle Georgia school districts. Elementary school within these school districts were comprised of pre-kindergarten through the fifth grade classes. Not all elementary schools within this school district have pre-kindergarten classes. For the purpose of this study, kindergarten through fifth grade teachers were studied with general education teachers included as participants.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was defined by Patton (2002) as a tool in qualitative research to identify and choose members of a select group. The group or group of individuals was chosen based on possessing the knowledge and experiences the researcher needs in order to study a certain phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Purposive sampling was chosen because the researcher needed to select a certain group of individuals with the knowledge and experience of teaching students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Additionally, the researcher used convenience sampling in order to choose the subjects to participate in the research.

To gather a wider variance of participants, the researcher attended professional development seminars to solicit participants. The researcher attended professional development meetings after hours. Consent forms and survey forms were distributed after the professional development to the various general education elementary school teachers in attendance at the meetings in areas in middle Georgia. The consent forms included six questions. The questions included:

- Name
- Contact information
- Years teaching experience

- Pre-service special education classes
- In-service special education classes
- Would they be interested in participating in an interview?

The researcher chose approximately 12 participants to individually conduct approximately one-hour interviews.

Assumptions

The participants within the study were representatives of the general population of elementary education school teachers in the chosen school district. These teachers taught in an inclusion setting in their classrooms. For the purposes of the study, the researcher assumed that the survey and questionnaire participants understood each question and participants answered each question honestly and to the best of their ability.

Limitations/Delimitations

The scope of this study included general education teachers in elementary schools. Elementary school teachers in various school districts in middle Georgia were surveyed and interviewed once consent was received for an interview.

Definitions of Terms

The terms used throughout this research are defined as follows:

Convenience Sampling- Sampling in which the participants are chosen due to ease of accessibility (Maxwell, 1997).

Delimitations-Choices made by the researcher during the study. The parameters of the study as chosen by the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Differentiation-Making learning accessible to all students (Tomlinson, 2014).

Elementary Education-Children in grades Kindergarten through Fifth Grade (Doktor, 2010).

Free and Appropriate Education Act-The right of each child in a public school to have access to an education (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011).

General Education-The program of education based on state standards and evaluated by the annual state educational standards test (Smith, 2004).

General Education classroom-Classroom of typically developing children learning the state-approved standards (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010).

General Education Teacher-Teacher certification to teach the state-approved standards to typically developing children. General education teachers are not specifically certified to teach students with disabilities (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010).

Inclusion-Including students with disabilities in the general education classroom area and in participation with their non-disabled peers (Nutter, 2011).

IDEA 2010-A federal mandate that provides for federal protection of students with disabilities and their rights (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

Individualized Education Plan-An individual plan composed for the student with disabilities team that includes strategies to help that student attain academic success (Smith, 2004).

Interviews-A structured conversation on a particular subject (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Least Restrictive Environment-A federally protected right of every student with disabilities to be in a classroom setting least restrictive for academic success (Wieselthier, 2013).

Limitations- The parameters of a study that are beyond the control of the researcher and could influence the data (Taylor, Bogden, DeVault, 2015)

Purposive sampling-The research purposely chooses a select group or group of individuals due to a shared phenomenology or experience (Patton, 2002).

Shadowing-A program that allows a candidate for a job, or in this case a teacher, to follow a professional on the job and observe that professional with the goal of learning about that particular profession (Weiland, 2012).

Special Education Teacher- Teacher with specialized certification assigned to work with students with disabilities (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007).

Students with Disabilities-Students with qualifying disabilities eligible for services as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007).

Teacher Preparation Program: An accredited college or university program which prepares candidates to instruct students K-12 (Franklin, 2011).

Teacher Self-Efficacy-How the teacher rates himself or herself on the ability to successfully teach students and manage a classroom (Chu & Garcia, 2014).

Summary

As the number of students with disabilities increased, general education teachers have reported feeling inadequately prepared to handle the needs of students with disabilities. While special education teachers are certified to work with students with disabilities, few teacher preparation programs have addressed the needs of general education teachers working with students with disabilities. Though IDEA 2010 mandated the inclusion of students, the mandate did not include training of regular education teachers to prepare for students with special needs whose disabilities may be diverse.

General education teachers were targeted in this study. The study investigated to what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities? The researcher explored two areas in relation to this overarching question. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes? To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms? The researcher included in this study elementary general education teachers in various school districts in middle Georgia.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The right to a free and public education was protected by the Bill of Rights (Brennan, 1977). The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution of the United States provided the basis for the non-discriminatory evaluation principle or non-biased testing in the public education system (Room, 2014). The non-discriminatory evaluation principle is the basis for special education (Weber, 2007). This principle provides for the identification of students with special needs and the evaluations of services needed for the identified students (Burriss & Welner, 2005).

Both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution dealt with the denial of a property right without the due process of law (Rhim, 2007). This denial of property was compared to the denial of education because every child has a right to an education and the denial of such was the same as taking something tangible from the child such as property (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Additionally, the Fourteenth Amendment provided for the equal treatment of all citizens, protecting citizenship rights and providing equal protection for everyone under the law (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). In the almost 150 years of battling for the equal rights of every citizen in the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 was mandated, assuring that students with disabilities had the right to receive a free and appropriate education just as their non-disabled peers were receiving (Nutter, 2011).

Separation and exclusion were the ruling factors in the early history of United States education (Esteves & Rao, 2008). The first legal battle upholding the practice of exclusion was documented in 1893. The Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the

exclusion of children with special needs when they legalized the banning of children from public school education based strictly on the student's underachieving academic skills (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998) Approximately 30 years later, the Wisconsin Supreme Court prohibited the education of a student with cerebral palsy because of the depressing and nauseating effect the student had upon the other school children and his teachers. (Smith, 2004). This perpetuated and legitimized the commonly held belief that children with disabilities were best kept at home and away from the view of the public.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) changed the law and brought about changes in civil rights and also in the rights of individuals with disabilities. *Brown v. the Board of Education* made it unconstitutional to deny anyone a right to an education based on race. Segregation was ruled illegal and immoral (1954). The Brown decision led the way to a growing understanding that all people, regardless of race, gender, or disability, have a right to a public education (Esteves & Rao, 2008).

The impact of the advocacy of civil rights legislation and the involvement of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy greatly altered the future of services for persons with exceptionalities (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012). Kennedy formed the President's Panel on Mental Retardation to study ways to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities (Sharfstein, 2014). When addressing this committee, Kennedy challenged them. Two major pieces of legislation (the Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendments of 1963 and the Mental Retardation Facilities and community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963) were passed within the year, and the legislative future of disability law was projected for the next 20 years (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012).

These actions and legislations prompted the acceptance of the philosophy of normalization or the deinstitutionalization movement (Kumar, 2013). A report from the President's Panel (1961) contained a file of exposes' of institutional abuses nationwide (Osgood, 2006). This report was the essential factors in the subsequent case law decisions, known as the "Right to Treatment" cases (Weber, 2005). The "Right to Treatment" cases were various lawsuits originating in the wake of President Kennedy spotlighting individuals with special needs (Kumar, 2013). In the late 1950s, researchers stated that approximately half a million people with special mental health needs were institutionalized in America (Osgood, 2006). The conditions of these people were deplorable; over crowdedness, lack of medical attention, improper care and diets, and no access to due process or advocates (Morrow & Weiser, 2012). The numerous law cases became the cornerstone for the legal principle of the least restrictive environment (Bagenstos, 2012; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

These movements also led to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975 (Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Tally & Crews, 2012). This bill highlighted the fact that people with developmental disabilities were excluded from many areas of life (Kanter, 2015). These areas included the educational facilities, the workplace, community activities, and the many aspects of both personal and public activities that many non-disabled individuals took for granted (Russo-Gleicher & Bennett, 2011). Again, state-run and clearly underfunded and under-resourced institutional facilities were prevalent, and systemic abuse and negligence was an issue (Gettings, 2011). These acts protected the rights of persons with developmental disabilities to have a right to appropriate treatment, services, and habilitation for such disabilities (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012).

Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shriner (2006) reported approximately 1.75 million students with disabilities were excluded from public education and separated from their general education peers (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shriner, 2006). In the mid-70s, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted (Yell, 2006). Even more students with disabilities were not receiving the proper services to assist them in attaining academic success (Yell, 2006; Alexander & Alexander, 2009; Tally & Crews, 2012; Morrow & Weiser, 2012; Gettings, 2011; Bennett, 2011). The President and Congress were forced to reassess special education and the general education system after the court cases of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education*.

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* changed the way that students with disabilities were educated in the public school systems (Sharfstein, 2014). Prior to these cases children with disabilities traditionally received inadequate and unequal treatment especially with regard to the public education system (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). Many children with disabilities were not allowed in public schools and those that were allowed were sequestered in separate locations of schools from their non-disabled peers. Schools claimed this was necessary due to the burden both monetary and of human resources involved with educating children with disabilities (Jon, 2011). In *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* the parents advocated for their children to receive equitable educational opportunities for their children (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Parents and advocates for students with disabilities used the courts in an attempt to force states to deliver equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Zigmond, 2003).

Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (1972) was one of two important federal trial court rulings that helped to lay the foundation that eventually led to the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), laws that changed American education (Kaufman & Hallahan, 2011).

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* also protected the treatment, services, and habilitation for a person with developmental disabilities and determined that more educational services and resources should be designed to maximize the developmental potential of the person and should be provided in the setting that is least restrictive of the person's personal liberty (Spooner, Knight, Browder, Jimenez, & Warren, 2011). The federal government and the states both had an obligation to assure public funds were not provided to any institution or other residential program for persons with developmental disabilities that did not provide treatment, services, and habilitation which was appropriate to the needs of such person; or that did not meet the minimum standards (Sass & Feng, 2012). These minimum standards included the provision of a nourishing, well-balanced daily diet to the persons with developmental disabilities (Sass & Feng, 2012). Also included were appropriate and sufficient medical and dental services (Sharfstein, 2014). The use of physical restraint on such persons unless absolutely necessary and prohibition of the use of such restraint as a punishment or as a substitute for a habilitation program was prohibited (Sharfstein, 2014).

Six court decisions, ranging from federal District Court consent decrees to a Supreme Court decision, provided the basis for later litigation and subsequent legislation: *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; *Hobson vs. Hansen* (1967); *PARC v.*

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972); *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972); *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970); *Larry P. Riles* (1972, 1974, 1979, and 1984).

Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas addressed the policy of separate but equal in school, integrating educational opportunities; this led the way for advocates for persons with disabilities (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). *Brown vs. Board of Education* was a landmark United States Supreme Court that abolished the separate but equal rules guiding public education policy. This Supreme Court decision overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896, which upheld segregation in schools. *Brown* ushered in the era of civil rights movement and special education rode the coattails of this movement.

Hobson vs. Hansen (1967) eliminated tracking systems that discriminated against students who were from lower socioeconomic areas or from minority groups; these students were included in public schools but biased assessments led to black students inaccurately labeled and placed in segregated classes which in turn, led to students (1) receiving substandard education; (2) lowering their educational opportunities based on their unalterable characteristics (Smith, 2004).

PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) was a case brought by parents of children with mental retardation who had been excluded from the public schools as a result of their disability (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011). *PARC* was a case based on two tenets of US constitution-equal protection and due process (Esteves & Rao, 2008). The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was sued by the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens due to the exclusion practices of the state of Pennsylvania (Smith, 2004). During the time, the early 1970s, the Pennsylvania public school systems were

refusing to enroll any students with a mental functioning level of less than five years of age (Tissot, 2011). This discriminated against students with cognitive and developmental disabilities. PARC was the first of many noteworthy cases that exposed the inequalities and refusal of educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Alexander & Alexander, 2009).

Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) concerned children labeled as exceptional; a class action suit was filed due to children being labeled as having behavioral problems or being mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed and/or hyperactive excluded from school without due process-extended the right for special education guaranteed in PARC to all children with disabilities (Tissot, 2011). *Mills* reinforced the right to a free public education and the decision delineated a set of due process requirements (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012).

Diana v. State Board of Education (1970) addressed the issue of use of standardized tests with minority students-Mexican Americans-performance. In *Diana* minority students were compared with their peer group rather than with nonminority groups which were later included in EAHCA to ensure nonbiased testing (Rhim, 2007).

Larry P. Riles (1972, 1974, 1979, and 1984) was a court case focused on African-American student-assessment bias. Subsequent placement, or the overpopulation and placement of minority students in special education, was regarded as discriminatory because use of intelligence tests that had not been validated on an appropriate population-resulted in a disproportionate number of minority students placed in special education (Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman, & Anastasiow, 2011). The court agreed and minority group members could not be placed until non-biased tests were developed. Also re-testing of students with disabilities was ordered and appropriate compensatory education provided

where necessary (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011). Compensatory education was defined as educational resources and services, such as tutoring or extended school year, owed to children with a disability who have been denied their Free and Appropriate Public Education (Sharfstein, 2014).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance, the Bill of Rights Act of 1975 provided the legislative basis for the early civil rights guarantees for persons with disabilities (Rhim, 2007). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 supported the rights of individuals with disabilities to be included in federally funded programs, thus extending the rights granted previously to persons of different races and ethnicities to persons with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 1999). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided no funding, but guaranteed rights (Wright & Wright, 1999).

The Development Disabilities Assistance Act and the Bill of Rights Act of 1975 provided rights for persons with disabilities by including a functional definition of disability, development of state plans providing for provisions for deinstitutionalization, state grants for services, and development of State Developmental Disabilities Councils (Morrow & Weiser, 2012). Language from this act included in Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

Exclusion from schools based on disability was included in state statutes throughout the United States and had been supported in the courts (Rhim, 2007). The parents of children with disabilities had become more frustrated with the exclusion of their children from tax-supported public schools and the scarcity of available services in state residential facilities (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Parents of students with disabilities advocated for these “bill of rights” for persons with disabilities. The ideas of community as a place for all people and of inclusion in schools and classrooms for all

children were direct descendants of deinstitutionalization and the philosophy of normalization (Cullen, Gregory, & Noto, 2010).

The deinstitutionalization movement and the philosophy of normalization greatly influenced the development of current special education services (Shaw, Keenan, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2010). This generalization movement was to expose students with disabilities to everyday, routine activities and events in order to model for these students' appropriate behavior and responses (Russo-Gleicher & Bennett, 2011). Efforts to reduce segregation and isolation and encourage the inclusion of all people into the community were the important results of the deinstitutionalization movement and normalization (Wieselthier, 2013).

The rights of children and individuals with special needs continued to capture the attention of lawmakers and policy makers and the reformists persistent through the years (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011). Six cases have strengthened the accessibility of educational services. *Timothy W. v Rochester, N.H. School District* (1989); *Goss v. Lopez* (1975); *Honig v. Doe* (1988); *Light v. Parkway C-2 School District* (1994); *Reese v. Board of Education of Bismarck R-V School District* (2002); and *Steinberg v. Weast* (2001) (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011).

In *Timothy W. v Rochester*, the issue was raised on whether or not a student's severe disability kept a school district from providing Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) for that student (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). FAPE must be available to all children between the ages of three and 21, inclusive, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school, as provided for in Sec. 300.530 (d) (IDEA, 2004). The court reiterated that FAPE is for ALL children. In this law case, the states were not given the privilege of deciding if a child was too severely handicapped to

learn. Every child was to receive a free, and appropriate, public education (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

In *Goss v. Lopez*, punishment was the key issue. This case did not specifically name students with disabilities, but it did hear the case of children being suspended or expelled from school. This case upheld that suspending students without due process violated the rights of students and interfered with their future success (Smith, 2004). The Court decided students' rights to education are a property protected by the 14th Amendment and the property cannot be taken away from the student without the students and/or their advocates, given due process rights to question suspensions due to behavior. The Court found that students facing suspension should at a minimum be given notice and afforded some kind of hearing (Smith, 2004).

With *Honig v. Doe*, the issue of expulsions and suspensions of students with disabilities was addressed. Honig adopted the 10-day standard maximum a student with disabilities could be suspended without a new IEP being written (Tissot, 2011). It also required a "stay-put provision" be in place prior to a suspension or an expulsion. The stay-put provision provides parents an opportunity to dispute a school's decision to move their child from the placement decided upon in the student's IEP (Tissot, 2011). When parents' dispute this move, the child is allowed to stay put until proper procedures, such as a called meeting of the child's educational team can meet within a given amount of time and allows the parent to have proper representation in the meeting (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011). Honig also provided guidelines for discipline procedures for children with disabilities (Tissot, 2011).

Light v. Parkway C-2 School District answered the question about legally removing a potentially dangerous child from a school system in order to protect either the

child or other children (Weber, 2006)? The answer in this case provided came in the form of a dual question review: Is adherence to the stay-put provision of IDEA putting this student at risk of self-injurious harm and putting others at risk as well? Has the school district exhausted every effort to keep everyone safe? School districts were mandated through this case to provide evidence that both requirements have been met to the best of the school district's ability (Weber, 2006).

Reese v. Board of Education of Bismarck R-V School District dealt with the courts extending the definition of appropriateness to include the review of a unilateral private school placement for children with severe disabilities and behavior disorders (Monahan & Torres, 2010). The courts in this case expanded the understanding of what is appropriate by considering two factors: 1) the restrictiveness of the educational placement and the ability of the school district to provide activities with nondisabled peers and 2) the amount of academic, not just behavioral, progress the child makes (Monahan & Torres, 2010).

Steinberg v. Weast (2001) measured the restrictiveness of a private school placement (Burch, Steinburg & Donovan, 2007). It also required the consideration of the progress made academically by the student with disabilities in order to determine the appropriateness of a private school placement (Tissot, 2011). The court in this case “upheld the view of appropriateness based on the amount of academic progress that the student had made and gave ‘due deference’ to the viewpoint of the educators at both the public and private schools concerning the possibility of academic success in a less restrictive environment” (Nutter, 2011).

The figure below graphically summarizes the court cases that have influenced special education in the American school system: court case, year it was settled, and outcome for students with disabilities. The figure highlights 12 influential court cases that were filed in order to uphold the standards outlined for students with disabilities and serve as precedents for a free and appropriate public education for all students of all abilities.

Figure 2: 12 court cases influencing FAPE and inclusion.

Court Case	Year	Court decision
<i>Brown vs. Board of Education</i>	1954	No more separate but equal
<i>Hobson vs. Hansen</i>	1967	Minority discrimination unconstitutional
<i>Diana v. State Board of Education (1970);</i>	1970	Exclusion of SWDs unconstitutional
<i>PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</i>	1972	Exclusion is not constitutional
<i>Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia</i>	1972	FAPE upheld for all students
<i>Larry P. Riles</i>	1972, 1974, 1979, & 1984	Subsequent placement unconstitutional
<i>Goss v. Lopez</i>	1975	Due process upheld
<i>Honig v. Doe</i>	1988	Due process upheld
<i>Timothy W. v Rochester, N.H. School District</i>	1989	FAPE challenged and upheld
<i>Light v. Parkway C-2 School District</i>	1994	Appropriate placement criteria
<i>Steinberg v. Weast</i>	2001	Appropriate placement due process
<i>Reese v. Board of Education of Bismarck R-V School District</i>	2002	Appropriate placement upheld

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law on Dec. 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush (Olinger 2013). The provisions of the act would not become effective until about six months later with the final stages of the law were published about two years after that. (Olinger, 2013). Key components of the IDEA 2004 included closely supporting special education regulations and No Child Left Behind (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). The writers of IDEA 2004 assured that students with disabilities were fully included in the district-wide achievement measures (IDEA. ed. gov, 2012). These measures, or assessments, demanded that states and school districts document academic progress with students with disabilities (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012).

With the passage of IDEA 2004, the terms least restrictive environment and mainstreaming became almost synonymous, especially in the special education atmosphere (Esteves & Rao, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 was a federal mandate that provided and protected the rights of children with disabilities to have the same quality of education as their non-disabled peers (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). IDEA 2004 provided for eight guarantees in the public school system. These guarantees were 1) zero reject, 2) identification and evaluation, 3) Free and Appropriate Public Education, 4) Least restrictive environment, 5) procedural safeguards, 6) technology-related assistance, 7) personnel development and 8) parental participations (Yell, 2006). IDEA 2004 improved on all the prior legislation that in the past had sought to mandate the rights of children with disabilities and their parents (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007).

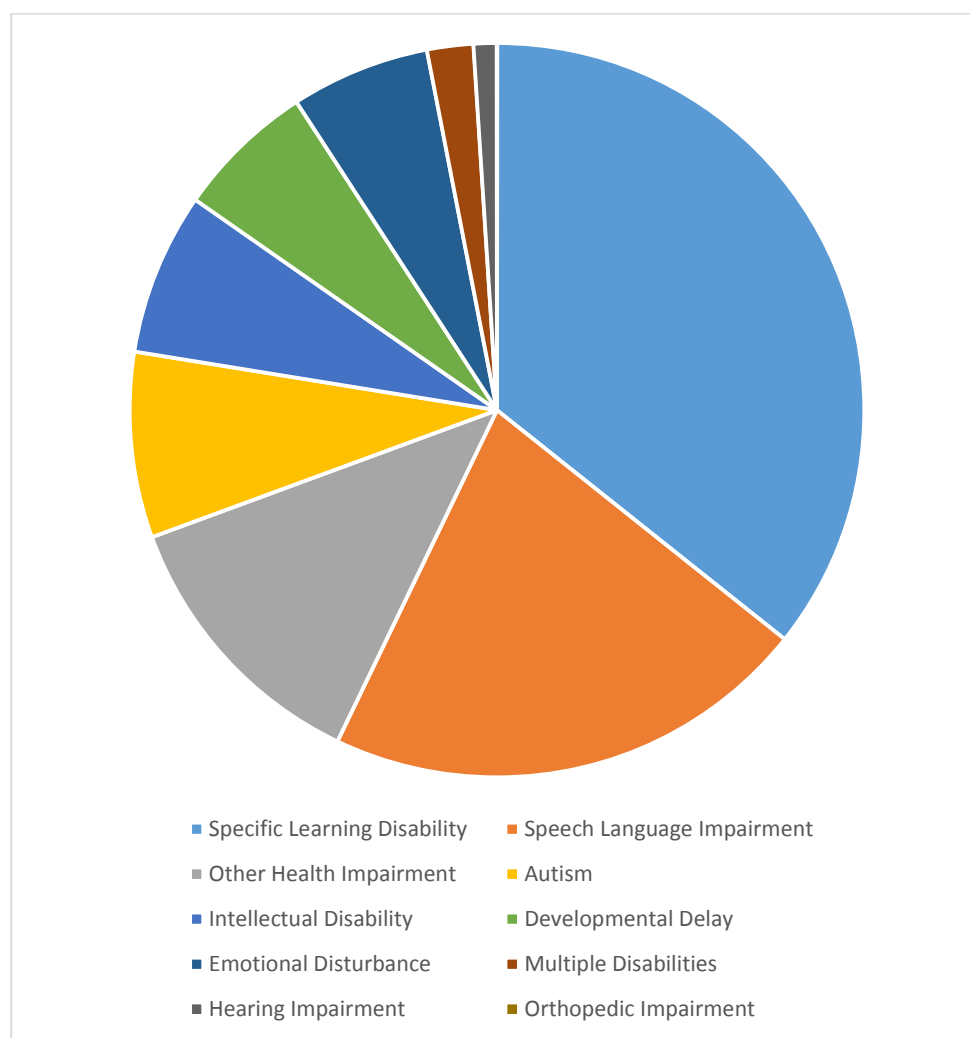
Students with disabilities were a diverse group of students with a plethora of special needs that ran the gamut of mild to severe/profound (Wieselthier, 2013). The population of public schools in America was comprised of approximately 13% of

students with special needs (Jimenez, Mims, & Browder, 2012). The majority of the over six and a half million students with disabilities received most of their public school education in the general education classroom (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2011).

In Figure Three (below) a pie chart is illustrative of the categories of disabilities detailed in IDEA 2010. Nationally, students with disabilities fell within the 13 special education categories disability categories: Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Autism, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Visual Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Deaf/Blindness (IDEA, 2010; Shaw, Keenan, Madaus, & Banerjee, 2010). This pie chart illustrates the percentages of students with disabilities, ages three-21, enrolled in the public school systems in the school year 2013/14. Thirty-five percent were diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability; 21% Speech or Language Impairment; 12% Other Health Impairment; 8 % Autism; 7% Intellectual Disability; 6% each Developmental Delay, Emotional Disturbance; 2% Multiple Disabilities; and 1% each Hearing Impairment and Orthopedic Impairment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Almost all, about 95 percent of school-age children and youth who were served under IDEA during the school calendar year 2012–13, were enrolled in regular schools. Approximately three percent of children and youth ages 6–21 served under IDEA, were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities; one percent of the special education population were enrolled in regular private schools (Rhim & O’Neil, 2013).

Figure Three: Percentage distribution of children ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) disability type: School year 2012–13 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).



The remaining one percent of school-aged students with disabilities were in separate residential facilities (public or private), homebound or in hospitals, or in correctional facilities (Rhim & O'Neill, 2013).

Public schools must comply with IDEA 2004 (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007).

Teachers must provide a free, appropriate public education for all students at every public school in the United States (IDEA 2004). The definition of free in regards to schools supports the principle of zero reject. Zero reject means that all students with disabilities have the right to be provided an appropriate education as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment (Friend, 2011). The education is mandatory and provided by the local school district despite the expense (Friend, 2011).

Appropriate education was basically defined as an education tailored to the child's needs, thus making the access to a free education meaningful. School districts today base their definition of appropriate on *Board of Education v. Rowley, 1982* (Rowley, 1996). Due to the court's ruling, school districts must apply a two question inquiry, known as the Rowley test, to determine if a child is receiving an appropriate education (Tissot, 2011). An appropriate education was one that is delivered free of charge under public direction, administration and expenditures. It must meet the state standards and include individualized preschool, elementary, and secondary school education, and follows the procedural requirements set forth by IDEA (Nutter, 2011).

According to *Brown v. the Board of Education*, education was identified as one of the most significant responsibilities of state and local governments. Therefore, school districts must provide an education for all students within the public education setting (Tissot, 2011). If the most appropriate education for a child with disabilities was not possible within the public education setting, then that school district must provide an

education for the child in a private school setting at the school district's expense (Wieselthier, 2013).

The impact this has had on children with disabilities was that every child, through the principle of equal protection as provided via the Fourteenth Amendment, has access to an education that was free and meaningful (Nutter, 2011). This means that every child in America, despite their ability or disability, had a chance at success by way of the educational system. Educators strived to locate and identify children that display characteristics of having special needs, either functionally or academically. Once those children were found, then efforts were taken to assess those children and identify their special strengths and needs (Murdick, Gartin & Crabtree, 2007; Weber, 2006; Weber, 2007).

The writers of IDEA 2004 very specifically outlined the steps that must be taken once a child was identified with special needs (Friend, 2011).

- Among these specifics was that a team was established. The team was comprised of the student, the parents, the special education teacher, the general education teacher, administrators, and service provider(s) for the child. The team met regularly to develop an Individual Education Plan (Wright & Wright, 2006).
- This team may decide that the child needed the services of a speech language pathologist, a physical therapist, and an occupational therapist.
- The team may decide that the student needed every textbook available in Braille or that the student needed a modified curriculum and adaptive textbooks (Jimenez, Mims & Browder, 2012).

- The team may decide the child needed a one-on-one paraprofessional in order for the child to attain success in the classroom and in the academic setting (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Whatever the team decided was the least restrictive environment for that child, the school system was to provide that service or services at no charge to the child or the child's parents (McLaughlin, 2010).

With the passage of IDEA 2010, the word inclusion came to the forefront in regards to students with disabilities taught in the regular education classroom (Shaw, Keenan, Maddaus, & Bannerjee, 2010). Inclusion is defined in IDEA as,

to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature of the severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular education with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Turnball, Turnball, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013, p. 38)

The goal was to eliminate the line between regular education and special education as teachers strived to follow the federal mandate of including students with special needs as much as possible in the regular education classroom (Friend, 2011).

Some researchers have identified four stages of inclusion (Turnball, Turnball, Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013; Olinger, 2013). Mainstreaming, the practice of removing students with disabilities from self-contained classrooms and moving them alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms (Olinger, 2013). Basically, the mainstreaming model was moving the student with disabilities out of their special education classroom and expecting that child to adapt to their new environment (Dunn,

1968). The student with special needs received academic instruction in core subjects in the general education classroom (Olinger, 2013).

The second stage included the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Harkins, 2012). The REI was an attempt to reform classrooms by making them more disabilities friendly. This model made the boundaries more flexible between special education and general education (Harkins, 2012). It also promoted the idea that the education of students with disabilities is the responsibility of all educators' not just special educators (Will, 1986).

The third stage of inclusion was inclusion through accommodations (Verbeke, 2002). Accommodations ran the gamut from individualized attention from a teacher or para-professional or to a unique learning strategy or educational resources (Verbeke, 2002). The main goal of accommodations was to help the student with disabilities succeed in the general education classroom setting (Stevens, Everington, & Kozar-Kocsis, 2002).

The fourth stage of inclusion involved restructuring or redesigning the regular education classroom by including more built-in resources for all the students in the classroom. This redesign created a new environment of merged general and special education resources. Universal Design of Learning (UDL) created a more flexible learning environment for both students and educators (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Olinger, 2013; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Sailor, 2002; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2002). The flexibility of the UDL paved the way for students with disabilities to have more access to the academics and resources of the general education classroom (Rose & Meyer, 2006).

The clarifications used in the regulations and procedures of IDEA were meant to preserve the rights of students with disabilities and their families and to protect school

districts as they provided free and appropriate public education to every student in their school districts. Parents were also empowered under the provisions of IDEA. It was mandated under IDEA that parents had to receive proper documentation of evaluations and assessments of their children with disabilities. Written consent of the testing and the timeframe of completion of the testing by the parents were required. Parents also had to receive the documented results of the testing within a timely manner (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2012). When specific guidelines were provided, the students, their families and educators were then equipped with the tools for success. IDEA did not; however include training for regular education teachers. Many general education teachers reported feeling inadequate to handle students with disabilities now attending general education classes (Nutter, 2011).

Students with disabilities were a group of individuals that require accommodations or adaptations to either the curriculum or the classroom in order to attain success either academically or functionally (Hauerwas, Brown, & Scott, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 disability was further defined to include “disorders in one or more of the basic psychological process” (IDEA 2010). “Each state must establish procedures to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special education, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education at environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (20 U.S.C. 1412(5)(B)). These disabilities could affect a child’s academics, cognitive thinking skills, mobility, and daily living skills. The extent these disabilities had on a child runs the

gamut from minor to debilitating (IDEA, 2010). The academic needs of these same children also were incredibly diverse as these children were able, or unable, to access the curriculum (Shurr & Bouck, 2013).

Public schools compliance with IDEA 2010 was mandatory (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). Special education teachers must provide a free, appropriate public education for all students at every public school in the United States (IDEA 2010). Educators must strive to locate and identify children that display characteristics of having special needs, either functionally or academically. Once those children were found, then efforts must be taken to test those children and identify their special strengths and needs (Wieselthier, 2013).

The writers of IDEA 2010 very specifically outlined the steps that must be taken once a child is identified with special needs. Among these specifics is that a team is established and that team meets regularly to develop an Individual Education Plan (Murdick, Gartin & Crabtree, 2011). This team may decide that the child needs the services of a speech language pathologist, a physical therapist, and an occupational therapist. The team may decide that the student needs every textbook available in Braille or that the student needs a modified curriculum and adaptive textbooks (Jimenez, Mims & Browder, 2012). The team may decide the child needs a one-on-one paraprofessional in order for the child to attain success in the classroom and in the academic setting (Jimenez, Mims & Browder, 2012). Whatever the team decides is the least restrictive environment for that child, the school system is to provide that service or services at no charge to the child or the child's parents (McLaughlin, 2010). This included if the team decided that the least restrictive environment for the child was the general education classroom (Friend, 2011).

Court Cases Due to IEP Violations

With increasing numbers of students in inclusive classes, students with disabilities are in general education teachers' classes. General education teachers are responsible for all students as well as students with a range of disabilities. General education teachers are additionally part of the IEP team that writes goals for each student with disabilities.

While major responsibilities for teaching all students is broad and usually curriculum based, an additional responsibility is placed on general education teachers. They must not only attend IEP meetings and understand the strategies necessary to assist students with disabilities with learning, they must also be signers on the students' IEPs, and with their signatures become legally responsible for providing the services designated on the IEP documents.

In 1992, a landmark court case, *Doe vs. Withers*, was heard in court. This case was significant in that the school and the teachers were held accountable for compliance of a student's IEP and the parents received monetary damages for non-compliance of their child's IEP (Wrightslaw, 2017). In recent years, court cases involving the implementation of a child's IEP and the progress of that child have become more common (Wrightslaw, 2015). In *Andrew vs. the Douglas County School District 2015*, parents accused school teachers and administration for not following their child's IEP therefore the child did not demonstrate any progress on his IEP goals (Wrightslaw, 2015). *Fry vs. Napoleon Comm. Sch. District* showcases a suit where parents complained that their daughter's IEP is not being followed due to the fact the girl's service dog was not allowed to accompany her to school and to classes. These parents sued, citing violations of their child's ADA rights and violations of IDEA (Wrightslaw, 2017). In *Phyllene W. v. Huntsville City (AL) Bd. of Ed.* (11th Cir. 2015), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the

Eleventh Circuit ruled in favor of the parents. The parents in this lawsuit claimed that employees with the school district failed to provide an adequate IEP for their child; therefore their child did not make adequate progress (11th Cir. 2015). In *Doug C. vs. Hawaii*, a lawsuit was brought about due to lack of parent participation in the creating and implementing of a student's IEP (9th Cir. 2013). The decision in *Winkleman vs. Parma City School District (2007)* (No. 05-983) ruled that parents do not need to hire an attorney and can represent their child's best interest in cases involving special education. An inadequate and poorly administered IEP was the focus of *J.P. vs the Sch. Bd. of Hanover County VA* (4th Cir. 2008). The courts further upheld the importance of IEP implementation in *Amanda C. vs. Clark Co. Sch. Dist. & Nevada Dept. of Ed.*, (9th Cir. 2012). Also in 2012, the courts adopted a "snap-shot" ruling to evaluate if an IEP is suitable in *R.E., M.E., et al vs. NYC Department of Education* (2nd Cir. 2012).

General Education

General education was the education offered to characteristically normal developing children. General education was deemed the customary education students received, based on state standards and evaluated by the annual state educational standards test (Lyons, Cappadocia, & Weiss, 2011). Typically developing children were educated in the general education classroom which was a classroom of normally developing children based on the state-approved standards (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010). General education teachers had certification to teach the state-approved standards to typically developing children. Teachers were not specifically certified to teach students with disabilities (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsait, & Cosier, 2011).

Special Education Teacher Preparation

Prior to the Civil Rights' Movement of the 60s, students with disabilities were either sequestered at home or institutionalized (Kuehn, 2013). Special education teacher preparation meant pre-service teachers were trained in residential facilities where students with disabilities received academic services (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). Due to all the changes the Civil Rights' Movement brought to the education of students with disabilities, the methods in which special education teachers were trained also changed. The programs moved from residential treatment centers to colleges and universities (Kuehn, 2013). Special education teachers were required to follow a program of study with training specific to the disabilities of the children to be served (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010).

General Education Teacher Preparation

Research revealed flaws and inconsistencies in teacher education programs (Lang, 2014; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010). Teachers must be prepared to not only adapt their teaching to meet the needs of students with disabilities, but teachers must be instructed to adapt the very environment wherein the students with disabilities learn (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). General education teachers must be prepared to effectively teach students with disabilities (Allington, McGill-Franzen, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). According to previous researchers, experienced general education teachers do not any receive special education training during their preservice years (Feustal, 2015). General education teachers may not be equipped with the knowledge needed to support students with disabilities in their general education classrooms (McCray & McHatton, 2011). It has been reported that general education teachers feel very comfortable with their general education students but

that comfort level did not generalize to students with disabilities (Feustal, 2015; Mumba & Chitityo, 2008).

Researchers have also reported a lack of fidelity in regards to the training of special education teachers and general education teachers (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Rosas & Campbell, 2010; Mitchell, 2014; Wogamon, 2013). It is reported that general education teachers exhibit more content knowledge, however, special education teachers possess more of the strategies needed to teach students with disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Rosas & Campbell, 2010; Wogamon, 2013; Mitchell, 2014). The fidelity stems from the reported lack of planning time between regular education teachers and their special education counterparts (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Carpentar & Dyal, 2007; Kosik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Wogamon, 2013). Researchers also report a lack of training in special education strategies for general education teachers (Kosik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009; Wogamon, 2013).

General education teachers should have pre-service and in-service programs to be prepared to teach students with disabilities (Dodge Quick, 2011). Few general education teachers receive the special education training necessary to adapt their classrooms or lesson plans (Walker, 2012; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot, & Goodman, 2003; Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2006). According to Blecker & Boakes (2010) and other researchers, teacher education preparation programs need more preparation and training in special education strategies (Rodriquez, Saldana, Moreno, 2012; Glazzard, 2011; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Wogamon, 2013).

Currently standards for teacher education programs must include the components of curriculum, instruction, assessment and professionalism (NCATE, 2013). According to the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accredited teacher education programs must be reviewed by an accreditation council (Walker, 2012). Teacher preparation programs are reviewed by the National Council Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), all included under CAEP (NCATE, 2013). Special education programs include the same components as well as adaptive curriculum, assessments, learning environments, and collaboration (NCATE, 2013). Adaptive curriculum, instruction and assessment were not required for general education teachers (Walker, 2012).

Attitudes of General Education Teachers to Inclusion

Teacher attitudes were important to the performance of their students academically (Cassidy, 2011). Positive teacher attitudes in inclusion were vital to the student outcomes (Ryan, 2009). Successful inclusion depended upon numerous variables, including teacher attitudes concerning students with disabilities (El-Ashry, 2009; Cramer, 2014). In 2003, Oakford and Hastings researched the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards students with disabilities. Oakford and Hastings focused on the severity of the disabilities and the pre-service teacher's training. In this study, the teachers' attitudes were affected by the severity of the disabilities in the classrooms.

Richard and Clough (2004) conducted a study that encouraged the addition of adding inclusion to a student teacher's observation time. According to these researchers, pre-service teachers reported better attitudes towards students with disabilities in their classrooms if they had actual experiences either working with students or observing someone working with students with disabilities (Richard & Clough, 2004; Wogamon,

2013). Teachers' attitudes were improved because the exposure to differentiation techniques and the application of the techniques with special education students.

Research conducted by Forlin and Chambers (2011) supported this observation. These researchers found that pre-service teachers that had either received training or had observed students with disabilities in the classroom had more confidence in their own abilities to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Wogamon, 2013). Observations provided opportunity for pre-service to see how in-service teachers applied the strategies to meet individual needs of students.

Cagney, 2009, examined general education teachers' attitudes in regards to students with special needs in the general education classroom (Cagney, 2009). Cagney found that teachers at all levels of education (elementary and secondary) are more stressed and feel less prepared to teach students with disabilities (Cagney, 2009). Cagney also found that in her research, teachers were more inclined to express negative attitudes with students with special needs in their classrooms (Cagney, 2009).

Negative attitudes, portrayed through the teachers' lack of confidence, were seen as one of the barriers for pre-service teachers who were going to be working with students with disabilities experience in the inclusion classroom (British Columbia Teachers' Foundation, 2006; Murawski, 2006; Irsherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Spence, 2010). Confidence barriers in these students were tracked to the lack of planning time that should be facilitated by school administrators for special education and general education teachers to successfully collaborate.

Other documented barriers included knowledge, or the seeming lack of knowledge, and organization. Some teachers reported that their lack of knowledge of students with disabilities and their lack of strategies contributed to barriers to their

students' inclusion experiences (British Columbia Teachers' Foundation, 2006; Murawski, 2006; Irsherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Spence, 2010). Others reported that administrators' lack of organization in arranging training and planning time for regular education inclusion teachers and special education teachers contributed as barriers in their students' inclusion experiences (Irsherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008).

Researchers have long held that the least restrictive environment was the best placement for students with disabilities (McLeskey & Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson, 2011; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012). Students with disabilities had more social interaction opportunities in the inclusion classroom than in the more restrictive self-contained classrooms (Tissot, 2011). However, more and more general education teachers were concerned about their lack of instructional strategies to teach students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012). Studies have shown that both teachers, general and special, need to display confidence in both special education strategies and in general academic content and both general and special education teachers must employ flexibility and share all the responsibilities of teaching students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in order to achieve success in the classroom (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Bouck, 2007; Conderman, 2011; Feustal, 2015; Moin, Magiera, & Zigmund, 2009; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014).

Research conducted by Parriera, 2015, surveyed elementary, general education teachers. The survey included the years of the teacher experience, the training of the teacher and the general attitudes of students with disabilities (Parriera, 2015). The research did include the severity of the disability (Parriera, 2015). The findings of this research were mixed in that some teachers had little training but more positive attitudes

while some teachers had more training but did not have positive attitudes about teaching inclusion classrooms (Parriera, 2015).

Figure 4: Important Information from the Literature

Authors/Year Type of Source	Terms	Theoretical/ Conceptual	Methods	Findings	Notes
Oakford & Hastings, 2003	Pre-service teacher candidates	Adreasen	Surveys	Severity of disability affected teachers' attitudes towards their ability to service students.	This research did not include any experienced teachers.
Cagney, 2009	General Education teachers	Cullen et al. TATIS	Surveys, interviews	Negative attitudes of teachers with pre-students with disabilities in the classroom.	This research did not include pre-service classes or in-service teacher training.
Franklin, 2011	Pre-service teacher candidates	Bandura	Surveys, interviews	Pre-service teachers do not feel confident teaching students with disabilities.	This research did not include teacher experience.
Wilkerson, 2012	General education teachers	Bandura	Surveys, interviews	Gen Ed teachers' positive attitudes in teaching student with disabilities.	This research did not include teacher experience.
Parreira 2015;	General education teachers	Cullen TATIS	Surveys	Mixed reviews on attitudes and teacher training.	Research contained small sample size.

Summary

The perceived abilities of general education teachers as they instruct students with disabilities in their general education classrooms is tasked to teacher preparation programs. Teachers' perceptions of their ability to help these students attain academic success may be increased, if more professional development is provided in order to have greater compliance with federal mandated inclusion.

It is possible that administrators in colleges and universities might need to pay heed to the perceived abilities of general education teachers to teach students with disabilities. The information these college administrators would garner from the interviews could demand more special education training and classes in order to provide more strategies for their teacher candidates. Data collected could assist with making pre-service programs for teacher candidates beneficial by revealing the necessity for more special education coursework for general educators.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Elementary general education teachers were challenged with the task of teaching students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to determine the perception of general education elementary teachers in teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms.

In this chapter, the researcher described the research design and methodology of this study.

The researcher presented the following information: questions, research design, setting, participants, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis. Issues in regards to validity and integrity were also discussed.

Research Questions

The researcher proposed to answer the overarching question:

To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

1. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?
2. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes?

Research Design

In order to answer these questions, the researcher used qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative research focuses on exposing perceptions and interpretations of reality (Feustel, 2015; Creswell, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Qualitative research allows for content analysis, it can be planned though structured flexibility, and it can be emergent in design (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative research may use a small population of participants, targeted for a more in-depth study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

There are six approaches to qualitative research design: phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, case study, and critical qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenology is utilized to capture the core of an event or an experience (Creswell, 2012). Ethnography studies a group or a sect's reaction to an event or an experience (Creswell, 2012). The goal of a grounded theory study is to develop a theory based on documented data (Creswell, 2012). Narrative descriptive analysis studies the participants' eye witness accounts to interpret the data and case study investigates a group's reaction within set parameters (Creswell, 2012). Critical qualitative research pinpoints the documentation in order to interpret and investigate an event (Creswell, 2012).

The type of qualitative research design chosen for this research was narrative descriptive research. This research design was qualitative due to the researcher documenting the perception of a group of specified participants. One of the strengths of qualitative provided a narrative of the participant's experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It provided a fuller comprehension to the problems and obstacles the participants are familiar with in the given situation (Mills, Abdulla, & Cribbie, 2010). Qualitative research has broader goals and describes phenomena in narrative form to

develop understanding via participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research utilized how and why questions in order to provide more in-depth information (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It was exploratory as the more in-depth information was assimilated by the researcher and processed (Mills, Abdulla, & Cribbie, 2010).

Qualitative research gave voice to the marginalized, provided explanations, a chronology of events, provided deeper meaning in the form of probing questions during interviews, and verbal evidence and was a quality way to study complicated issues (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A qualitative study can bring a more comprehensive perspective to the complexities of the proposed research questions.

The researcher chose qualitative research rather than quantitative research. Quantitative research was defined by statistics and numerical information (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Quantitative research does not allow for the first-hand experience of the participants (Plonsky, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to select only a small number of participants. Typically, qualitative research deals with a small number of participants (Creswell, 2012). A smaller participation number involved individuals or participants who adhere to pre-selected conditions related to chosen research questions (Creswell, 2013). The researcher chose this number in order to conduct interviews with general education elementary school teachers and gather data on their perceptions of inclusion. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a participation size of approximately eight to 14 is contingent on the data needed, resources available, and the need for the researcher to obtain in-depth information for perceptions among the participants. This sample participation size incorporated volunteer samples (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Interviews were conducted with the 12 participants. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), interviews attempt to add meaning to a qualitative research by including the participants' experience in the participants' own words. The participants were asked prepared interview questions and then the researcher probed the participants on their answers.

Random purposeful sampling was not chosen for this study as it allows a representative sample from the population in order to allow for generalizing for an entire population of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally the researcher did not chose a stratified sample for this study. A stratified sample involves selectively choosing representative subgroups from a larger population in order to generalize the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

For the purpose of this research, the researcher utilized qualitative inquiry to access the perceptions of general education elementary school teachers to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher employed purposive sampling to survey a select group of general education teachers with inclusive classrooms, or classrooms that include students with disabilities. The initial survey included questions such as the years teaching experience, pre-service classes, special education training, and general education course work. The teachers selected gave permission for interviews that garnered more data, such as their perceptions of teaching inclusion in their classrooms. Correlations between the demographics of the survey and the attitudes and perceptions of the teacher interviews, both positive and negative, were highlighted in this study. Both the negative and positive data can provide the basis of for opportunities for programs designed to prepare general education teachers in elementary schools to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Setting

The setting for this research was elementary schools in middle Georgia. The elementary schools included pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The classroom teachers involved in this study were general education teachers teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Participants

The participants in this study were general education teachers in elementary schools in middle Georgia school districts. Elementary school means pre-kindergarten through the fifth grade. Not all elementary schools within this school district had pre-kindergarten classes. For the purpose of this research, kindergarten through fifth grade teachers were utilized. Only teachers of general education classrooms were included as participants.

The researcher attended professional development in various locations after hours. The participants were asked if they would like to participate in a research study. The Consent forms were signed and then the researcher distributed a six-question survey for the volunteer teachers to complete (See Appendix C). The survey questions were: 1) Name; 2) Contact information; 3) Years teaching experience; 4) Pre-service special education classes; 5) In-service special education classes; 6) Would they be interested in participating in an interview? The criteria for the study was general education teacher in an elementary school, students with disabilities in the classroom, and at least five years' teaching experience. From the returned notices, the researcher chose approximately 12 participants to individually conduct one-hour interviews.

Demographics garnered from the interviews were the number of pre-service classes and post-service, or professional development special education training the

teachers had. The data collected included teacher experience, teacher preparation, and assistance needed to teach students with disabilities. The researcher recorded the perceptions of the general education teachers as to their preparedness to teach students with disabilities in the classroom, the pre-service special education classes the teachers had and the post-service or professional development in special education the teachers had.

Teachers interviewed had been working in general education classrooms five or more years. The five years or more criteria were important in order to get the perspective of a teacher with some experience in the classroom. The interviews (see Appendix D) provided data including the number of years teaching and the attitudes of general education teachers as to whether or not they perceived they were prepared to deal with the new requirements of IDEA 2010. The researcher gathered the thoughts, emotions, feelings and experiences of the participants from the interview data. The 12 participating elementary schools general education teachers were located in various school districts in middle Georgia.

Procedures

Approval was obtained from the IRB committee at Columbus State University prior to conducting this survey (see Appendix A). Each general education teacher at the elementary schools were invited by the researcher to participate in this research. The information provided to these general education teachers included consent forms (see Appendix B) and a six question survey (see Appendix C) they completed and provided their contact information to be interviewed. The researcher reiterated that participation in this study will be voluntary, that the study will be outlined and explained, and that their identities will be kept confidential. Participants were assured of the voluntary

participation and that all collected data would be secured and kept confidential.

Participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Figure 5 presents an analysis of the methodology used to answer the research questions.

Research Question	Instrumentation/Analysis	How will strategy answer the research question?
Overarching question: To what extent do general education elementary teachers perceive they are prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms?	This will be answered by the participants in the interview process.	This question will be answered by the participants in the interview process.
1. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classrooms?	This will be answered by the participants in the interview process.	This will be answered by the participants in the interview process.
3. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms?	This will be answered by the participants in the interview process.	This will be answered by the participants in the interview process.

Participants in this study were informed their participation was completely voluntary. Participants were also instructed they could choose which questions they wished to answer and that they could ignore questions if they so desired. Participants were provided with the researcher's contact information.

The issue of confidentiality was adhered to by the researcher. Paper data was locked up in a locking file cabinet with only the researcher having keyed access. Data collected electronically was kept in a password protected file. The researcher kept all identifying information confidential.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data included the survey data. This included permission to interview. The criteria was general education teacher, five or more years' experience, and students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher assimilated the data from the surveys into the varying categories labeled Table 1 (pg.35).

The next step was to contact the teachers that responded stating they would like to participate in an interview. The researcher contacted the participants and set up an interview time with them. The interviews lasted approximately an hour. The interview questions included open-ended questions asking the perceptions of the participants in teaching students with disabilities in the general education classrooms (see Appendix D). Once the interviews were completed the researcher analyzed the data by coding the answers. The answers were coded in order for the researcher to pinpoint and document the information provided in order to track any overt or underlying themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Presentation

The researcher proposed to first display data according to the order of questions provided by the participants. The presentation was a graph that will featured each of the research questions. The chart organized the answers of the participants' response. An example of this was RQ I: Participant 1-answer; Participant 2: answer. This graph displayed the participants, numbered in order to protect identity, and their answers.

For the second data analysis, the researcher analyzed data for a question and compared the responses and displayed the answers in a chart. The researcher coded each question

separately, and put the final codes in a table with the answers to the question as rows and the other as a column and then inserted the participants into the cell. In this case, the researcher took the answers to the overarching research question, 1) to what extent do general education elementary teachers perceive they are prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms? The researcher displayed a matrix of the participants' responses and then color coded the responses. Although the researcher did know what the responses to this question would be, the researcher expected to see the responses of confident, unsure, overwhelmed, and/or prepared. The researcher color coded these responses and graphed them in order to discover themes.

Summary

The researcher proposed to conduct a qualitative inquiry research study. The researcher employed a narrative descriptive analysis in order to answer the three research questions. Participants were chosen from various middle Georgia elementary schools. Once identified, a notice was sent asking for demographic information and permission for a follow-up interview. Once participants were identified and permission was granted for an interview, the researcher began the interview process. The interviews were conducted with 12 participants and lasted approximately one hour.

CHAPTER FOUR: REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gather information on the perceived readiness of elementary, general education teachers to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used thematic content analysis; participants provided thick rich descriptive data; however participant responses reflected experiences of the interview participants in their words. Post-service, in-service, or professional development special education preparation were examined to determine if there was impact on the perceived readiness of the teachers targeted in this study perceived to teach students with disabilities in their general education classes.

Research Questions

The researcher proposed to answer the overarching question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

1. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?
2. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes?

Research Design

In order to answer these questions, the researcher used qualitative inquiry in order to access the perceptions of general education elementary school teachers to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The use of qualitative design allowed the

researcher to obtain a “detailed understanding of central phenomena” (Creswell, 2008, p. 51). Qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher to capture data that portrayed the perceptions of the respondents to interview questions (Patton, 2002). The researcher employed purposive sampling to survey a group of general education teachers who had worked in inclusive classrooms, or classrooms that included students with disabilities. The researcher utilized interviews in order to assimilate qualitative data and to record the answers to the research question by having participants share their answers and experiences.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and placed into an electronic format (Word) as well as print format. The analysis process was cyclical. First, the researcher read each transcript. For the purpose of this study, the researcher hand coded transcriptions of the interviews, which allowed the researcher to develop possible themes and theories as the coding process evolved. While software programs provided methods to sort and organize large amounts of data, with a small purposive study, the researcher was able to notate short phrases necessary for coding. Krippendorff (2004) suggests the process of hand working with text allows the research to begin the deductive process.

In the first coding cycle, the researcher made notes on the margins of the printed transcriptions to begin the process, initiated a structure noting themes, simultaneously initiated a record of coding words and phrases and how the phrases and words emerged as themes as well as sub categories of themes.

As patterns and themes emerged, the researcher continued to review and added notes and coded initial themes and jotted down notes about emerging patterns. Additional terms were added as the researcher continued to review transcripts to discern similarities

and/or differences in coding phrases and words. The researcher then organized the data in handwritten charts to allow the information to be manipulated as categories and sub-categories continued to evolve (Saldana, 2015).

Once an initial pattern of themes emerged, a second round of coding was used in review to find emerging categories and sub-categories. Notations about newly found themes and sub-categories were added to the coding process record. Each transcription was reviewed multiple times utilizing the same iterative process. Finally, the researcher reviewed the results from the first two stages of coding and made a final review to see if further categories and themes emerged (Bowen, 2008; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Having reached a saturation point, the researcher decided no further coding was necessary.

The interviewees, according to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) provided information of individuals who have perceptions “that would otherwise not be available to the researcher” (p. 243). Interview questions and subsequent probing questions were established based on the research questions; probing questions were used to gather more specific data about the information from the respondent.

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat.

Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 111).

Reading and rereading data was used by the researcher, a constant comparative analysis looking for understanding and meaning and additionally looking for different or contrasting information (Silverman, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be based on Guba's (1981) constructs which provided strategies for ensuring that qualitative research was credible. The researcher can prove trustworthiness based on these constructs. Random sampling was used. The participants hailed from various organizations, both public and private. The participants provided a wide range of experiences and viewpoints. The questions asked during the interviews were presented in different forms and multiple probes were used. Peer scrutiny was also incorporated into this research. The participants were offered a chance to review the text to analyze if it correctly reflected their viewpoints. Five of the 12 participants took advantage of this member check opportunity and concurred that the text reflected their views and statements within the interview. Trustworthiness was also established by the qualifications of the researcher. Notes, or an audit trail, were kept during the research including reflections on the process. The researcher shares the qualifications and experience of classroom teachers. The researcher also returned to the previous research several times to examine and compare findings.

Overarching Research Question

To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities? To obtain respondents full range of knowledge, the researcher prepared the following probing questions (see Appendix D):

How long did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

What inspired you to get into teaching profession?

Was teaching general education your first choice? If not, what was your first choice?

What is your original certification?

How many years have you taught students with disabilities in your classroom?

What population of disabilities have you taught in your classroom?

What pre-service classes did you have?

Were these classes required?

What pre-service classes have you had on special education legislation?

How prepared do you perceive yourself to be in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom?

Overarching Research Question Interview Responses

Preparation to teach Students with disabilities

Respondents-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Twelve teachers that participated in filling out a six question survey, responded on their surveys they would like to participate in an interview. The questions on the survey included years teaching experience; what pre-service special education classes the teacher had; and what in-service special education classes the teacher had.

Teaching experience and exceptional child coursework

All respondents were female. Seven of the participants taught in public schools, four in private schools, and one of the participants taught in a charter school. All of the participants had at least five years teaching experience and all have students with disabilities in their general education classrooms.

All of the respondents were certified K-8 in the state of Georgia. Except for Respondents 2, 5, 9, and 10, all respondents reported wanting to be teachers all their lives. Respondent 2 was originally seeking a medical records degree but switched majors in college.

Respondent 5 did not know until she went to college and was indecisive on her major. She acknowledged that she was adept at working with people and chose teaching because she “thought it was a good match” (Interview 5, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 1).

Respondent 9 stated that she wanted to study psychology and was told she would need a doctorate to make any kind of money. Her stepfather asked her if she had ever thought about teaching but after talking with him she took some education classes and that led her to choose teaching as a profession.

Respondent 10 held an undergraduate degree in business/finance but after 10 years in banking, attained a master’s degree in elementary education.

Of the respondents that stated they knew pre-college they wanted to be teachers, Respondent 1 stated that both her parents are teachers and that inspired her to be a teacher. Respondent 4 stated she knew when she was five she wanted to be a teacher. Both of her grandmothers were teachers and she had great teachers in her student life that further convinced her to seek a teaching degree.

Figure 6. Data garnered from the initial surveys administered to general education elementary school teachers participating in this study.

General education elementary school teachers (coded by number)	Years teaching experience	Pre-service SPED courses	In-service SPED courses
1	5	1 Exceptional child	0
2	32	1 Exceptional child	1 inclusion 1 co-teaching 1 ADHD
3	32	0	1 Exceptional child
4	24	3-exceptional child; sped intro; sped follow-up	1-inclusion 1-co-teaching
5	26	1-exceptional child	0
6	13	1-exceptional child	2- co-teaching classes
7	32	0	4-2 co-teaching;2 RTI classes
8	7	1-exceptional child	1-co-teaching class
9	24	1-exceptional child	2 co-teaching seminars
10	13	4 classes	60 hours of sped classes
11	24	2-one intro; one follow-up	0
12	16	1-exceptional child	0

Respondent 7 recalled wanting to be a teacher “for as long as I can remember”

(Interview 7, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 1).

Respondent 11 reported a long family history of educators. She stated, “You have to know that my mother and my sister and my grandmother and my great-grandmothers

were all teachers. It has been our family career' (Interview 11, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 1). Respondent 12 credited her early experiences with teachers for her career choice. "My elementary school teachers....they had such a positive impact on my life. They were always willing to help and they were always there for me' (Interview 12, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 1).

All respondents except for one, reported that for most of their time teaching, they have had students with disabilities in their classrooms. When asked years of experience teaching students with disabilities in your classroom, Respondent 2 answered, "I have been teaching students with disabilities all my years because some not identified at first but midway through the school year these students were identified" (Interview 2, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 1).

Respondent 3 stated she had taught 25 of her years with mild disabilities but that six or seven of those years were teaching students with extreme behaviors and needs. Respondents 5, 6, 9, and 10 stated they had taught students with disabilities in their classrooms through their careers. Respondent 12 stated she had only taught students with disabilities in her general education classroom for three years.

All respondents were female. Seven of the participants taught in public schools, four in private schools, and one of the participants taught in a charter school. All of the participants had at least five years teaching experience and all have students with disabilities in their general education classrooms.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the researcher coded the descriptive data collected in this research in order to answer the research questions. The researcher organized the data in processes of First Cycle and Second Cycle data coding (Saldana, 2003).

First, the in-person interviews were transcribed and placed into an electronic format as well as a printed copy. Next, the researcher read each transcript. Then in the first coding cycle, the researcher made initial notes on the transcriptions to begin the initial coding process, establishing a structure, keeping a record of how the process of coding was initiated with each transcription. As patterns and themes emerged, the researcher made a list of initial themes and patterns for research.

Once an initial pattern of themes was discovered through structural coding, a second-level of coding was used in review of transcriptions to find emerging sub-categories. Sub-categories were added to the coding process record. Finally, the researcher reviewed the results from the first two stages and a final review to see if further categories and themes emerged until no further information was found.

Each transcription was reviewed utilizing the same process established in the coding record until all transcriptions were finished.

All coding was reviewed to determine if any additional areas were found which did not mirror the same findings with none being found: Research Question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive themselves to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classes? Research Question 1: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes? Research Question 2: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development

prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes? The perceived lack of modeling for and working with special education students; the unfamiliarity with special education legislation; the need to differentiate to meet needs; demographics-all female participants; experience can be a factor in the perception of working with students with disabilities.

Overarching Research Question

The overarching research question was to what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities? In order to answer this research question, the researcher asked the following questions and probes (see Appendix D): How prepared do you perceive yourself to be in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom? Probe: How long did you know you wanted to be a teacher? Probe: What inspired you to get into teaching profession? Probe: Was teaching general education your first choice? If not, what was your first choice? Probe: What is your original certification? Probe: How many years have you taught students with disabilities in your classroom? Probe: What population of disabilities have you taught in your classroom?

Findings:

The findings from this research included: Research Question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive themselves to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classes? Research Question 1: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes? Research Question 2: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes? The perceived lack of

modeling for and working with special education students; the unfamiliarity with special education legislation; the need to differentiate to meet needs; demographics-all female participants; experience can be a factor in the perception of working with students with disabilities.

Overarching Research Question

Overarching Research Question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

Respondents 1-5, 7, 9, 10, and 12 all reported they perceived themselves to not be well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Respondent 4 reported, “I don’t feel prepared at all. I feel very limited in my ability as do many of my colleagues (Respondent 4, 2016, January 2016, pg.1).” Respondents 6, 8, and 11 reported feeling “fairly well-prepared” with Respondent 11 adding that she “has done it (teaching) for so long, I feel fairly well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in my classroom (Respondent 11, 2016, January 2016, pg. 1).”

Theme 1– Lack of preparation

The majority of teachers interviewed reported that teacher preparation programs did not prepare to teach students with disabilities. Three teachers stated that they felt “fairly well prepared”.

Respondents 1-5, 7, 9, 10, and 12 all reported they perceived themselves to not be well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. Respondent 4 reported, “I don’t feel prepared at all. I feel very limited in my ability as do many of my colleagues” (Respondent 4, 2016, January 2016, pg.1).

Figure 7: This presents data from general education teacher interview responses about preparation to teach Students with disabilities.

Respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Feel prepared												
Feel fairly well prepared						X		X			X	
Do not feel prepared at all	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X

Respondents 6, 8, and 11 reported feeling “fairly well-prepared” with Respondent 11 adding that she “has done it (teaching) for so long, I feel fairly well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in my classroom” (Respondent 11, 2016, January 2016, pg. 1).

All of the respondents except for Respondent 3 and 7 had an exceptional child class in their pre-service years. Respondent 3 had the class required as an in-service, professional development requirement. Respondent 7 did not have this class in pre-service or in post-service. Respondents who had taken an exception child class reported the class did not prepare them to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Research Question 1

To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes? Additional probing questions included (see Appendix D):

- Did your level of pre-service prepare you to teach the range of special needs students currently in your classroom?
- Did preservice allow you to meet the needs of students who might range from mild to moderate disabilities?
- The participants were also probed as to what extent have pre-service special education classes helped you to apply modifications and accommodations in your classroom?

Theme 2 - Range of Students with disabilities

Respondents reported populations of disabilities in general education classrooms included: Autism, ADHD, specific learning disability, hearing impaired, visually impaired, Other Health Impaired, Cerebral Palsy, and numerous students with mobility impairments.

One interviewee stated, “To be completely honest there are more special ed students in our classroom nowadays so I have changed my teaching. I have to differentiate a whole lot more than I used to. I think the modifications being done to differentiate so that almost every kid needs some kind of differentiation plan in education. We do have to meet multiple levels of needs. You can become so bogged down in the ones that you do have that have their IEPs that it’s hard to meet the needs of the regular ed students. So it has changed a great deal” (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 4).

Theme 3– Teacher preparation and one exceptional child class

Most respondents reported their teacher preparation programs had one exceptional child class.

Respondent 1 stated, “I feel like I was really underprepared...I feel like I can definitely say I was underprepared. I am not sure if that was because I was a general education major but I think it was strange that the only class that I had online and that was all that they offered. The online class was the basic Special Ed class that every teacher has to take” (Interview 1, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 7).

Research Question 2

To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes?

The researcher asked the following probing questions (see Appendix D):

- Has your level of post-service training prepared you to teach the range of special needs in your classroom?
- In your district, what is the process used to involve general education teachers in the implementation of the IEP requirements for a student with disabilities?
- Did preservice or in-service professional development allow you to meet the needs of students who might range from mild to moderate disabilities?
- What special education training does your school district offer?
- How have the changes in federal requirements for special education students changed your teaching?
- How much preservice and in-service preparation have you been offered concerning federal mandates for inclusion as well as special education

requirements for general education teachers to participate in the IEP process?

- As well as the interview questions, the participants were also probed as to the IEP process in their schools, how often they meet with the special education teacher, how IEP meetings have changed, their knowledge of Special Education Law, and their confidence level in incorporating IEP goals into their lesson plans.

Theme 4 – In-service and post-service professional development for general ed teachers working with Students with disabilities were limited.

Teachers reported that professional development programs targeted to general education teachers working with Students with disabilities were limited. Specifically teachers reported little or no professional development programs to ensure that general education teachers had background information in working with Students with disabilities. In particular, teachers reported that the range of Students with disabilities was increasingly broad.

Additionally teachers stated that professional development (pre-service, in-service, or post-service) about Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was limited. While teachers were somewhat aware of No Child Left Behind federal requirements for inclusion of students with disabilities, there was little professional development presented to general education teachers concerning specific legislation about Students with disabilities (IDEA 2004, 2010).

Theme 5 - Post-service, in-service, or professional development

Other than Respondent 10, respondents reported post-service training was limited. Respondent 10 stated that she took 60 hours of special education training that was self-initiated. She stated with this question that her post-service training helped some but that she “could have used more help and more strategies” (Interview 10, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg.2).

Theme 6- Special Education Legislation and Post-service training

In regards to special education legislation training with teachers, only one of the respondents was aware of any special education legislation training offered to teachers. Respondent 4 stated that her district offered special education legislation training every year. She stated that every year at the beginning of the school year that a large meeting was held at the district level to discuss changes in special education legislation and any changes in requirements. She stated that at the beginning of the school year at her school, the principal reiterates the changes at their first faculty meeting. She also stated that she gets updates from her district via quarterly emails. Respondent 4 also stated that she is a member of acronym (PAGE) and gets updates and special education legislation updates via this professional group.

The other respondents stated that either their districts did not offer special education legislation training or that they did not know of any such opportunities. When asked how they kept up with changes in federal special education legislation, seven of the respondents said they did not keep up, with Respondent 6 stating she relied on the special education teacher to keep up with the legislative requirements for her. Five of the respondents stated they receive their updates from their professional membership in

PAGE. Respondent 11 stated she is a member of PAGE and also gets her updates from a family member with a special needs child.

The respondents were also asked about their knowledge of IDEA 2004 & 2010. They were also asked about No Child Left Behind. Eleven of the respondents stated they were familiar with No Child Left Behind. Many of them answered that No Child Left Behind meant that all teachers were held accountable for all their students' progress-even the students with disabilities. Respondent 1 stated "I don't know much about them if anything" (Interview 1, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 4). Respondent 2 stated she knew nothing about IDEA but knew about "three/ fourths of No Child Left Behind" (Interview 2, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 2)." Respondent 4 stated she was familiar with both. "I know that they changed students to the least restrictive model for students. This is why our school district changed to an inclusive classroom. I know that it requires that the state of Georgia be held accountable for compliance" (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 5 stated, "IDEA...It sounds familiar...but no, I don't know what it is. No Child Left Behind, I am familiar with the term" (Interview 5, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 3). Respondent 6 stated "I know nothing about the first one, unless the first one is the second one by a different name. Yes, I know about No Child Left Behind" (Interview 6, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 3). Respondents 7 and 8 stated they were familiar with the laws. Respondent 9, when asked about No Child Left Behind and IDEA 2010 stated, "I am familiar with them. Somewhat. I hope I am (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 4)." Respondent 10 stated, "I know a little bit. I know more about No Child Left Behind and I felt the child was our regular education students that got left behind" (Interview 10, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 11 stated she knew “very little” about either one. Respondent 12 stated, “I know my students will be held responsible, through No Child Left Behind, for a test. Which for me is third grade level there are in, which is not the grade level they are on. I know they are deserving of an education but they are also responsible for a test” (Interview 12, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 4).

The interview participants were also asked how the changes in federal requirements for special education students have changed pedagogical practices.

Respondent 1 stated she did not know. She stated, “I am sure there are things out there but I have not really looked. I feel like it is not a priority, but it should be. I don’t know. It should be a priority because I feel like I have failed some of my special ed students because I have not had the proper training. I don’t know how to differentiate for them, especially in my classroom” (Interview 1, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 2 stated the changes are a lot more students with disabilities in her classroom. Respondent 3 also noted this, stating, “It seems like early in my years children were removed more easily, in later years they were in my classroom much more. Mainstreaming or they’d learn from regular ed kids. I don’t know what the federal regulations were but that’s what I remember seeing” (Interview 3, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 3).

Respondent 4 stated, “There is a lot more differentiation. I’m spending a lot more time with data collection for those students. You are definitely confined to a schedule such as if the student is out of the room receiving services you are limited to what you can teach while they are gone’ (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pgs. 3-4).

Respondent 5 stated she thinks differentiation is the biggest thing that is affected.

Respondent 6 had no idea how the changes had affected her.

Respondent 7 stated, “The students have an IEP. It makes me more aware of their needs and it makes me accountable to check on what the student needs. I am more aware of the testing differences. I fight for testing. I make sure that we are doing what the student needs. They are in a red folder on my desk during the school day. I am constantly checking to make sure we are giving these students what they need” (Interview 7, interview, January 6, 2017, pgs. 4-5). Respondent 8 stated that her district was already compliant therefore the federal changes in education did not affect her teaching.

Respondent 10 stated, “A lot of things have changed. I think we have more special ed in our classrooms. Some are not diagnosed. Quite a few students now qualify for services” (Interview 10, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 4). Respondent 11 answered, “It (the changes) have caused me to change my teaching. I have to differentiate in order to accommodate all the different learning styles in the classroom’ (Interview 11, interview, January 10, pg. 3). Respondent 12 stated, “I have noticed in my 17 years they are not out of my classroom as much. They are in my classroom more. When I first started out, they were out of my classroom quite a bit. They would go to lunch with us and to PE, but now, they are in my class for a good part of the teaching time. So that’s the biggest difference I’ve noticed” (Interview 12, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 3).

When probed as to if the post-service classes had helped to meet the range of needs of the special education students in the general education classroom setting all the respondents stated no. When probed if the post-service classes had helped with making accommodations and/or modifications to their classrooms 11 of the respondents answered

no. Respondent 10 stated that it did help her with strategies but that again she could have used more strategies and she needed more help.

Four of the respondents had had no post-service special education training or professional development. One respondent had an exceptional child class in post-service training; one respondent had one co-teaching class; two respondents had had two co-teaching classes; two respondents had had one inclusion class and one co-teaching class; and one of the respondents had two co-teaching classes and two Response to Intervention classes.

Theme 7 - The IEP process and post-service training

All the teachers interviewed were asked questions about the IEP process. Most of the respondents were familiar with their school's process for identifying students with an IEP in their schools. Respondent 2 stated that there is a process at her school but she looks in Infinite Campus (her school's reporting tool) to find out for herself which students have an IEP. Respondents 3 and 7 both stated there are very involved processes at their schools but they each take the initiative and finds their students with IEPs.

Respondent 5 did not know of a formal process at her school but stated she initiates finding her students with an IEP. Respondent 6 also stated not a lack of a formal process at her school. She stated the special education teacher would meet her face-to-face to inform of students with IEPs in her room. Respondent 8 stated she looks for the students with IEPs herself. Respondent 9 stated the special education teacher alerts her to students with IEPs in the classroom. Respondent 10 self-initiates seeking out her students with IEPs. Respondent 12 stated she is notified right away if there is a student with an IEP in her classroom.

Only Respondent 1 stated she was unsure of the process for notification of a student with special needs in her classroom. She stated she will notice issues with a student and then, self-initiated, she will seek out the special education teacher and ask if that student has an IEP. Most of the respondents stated that their school's lead special education teacher would either seek them out face to face to inform them that a student with an IEP was in their classroom or they would receive an e-mail with that information.

Two teachers, Respondent 4 and Respondent 11 stated their schools had the policy to sign a paper that the lead special education teacher had informed them that a certain student or students had IEPs and were in their classrooms. Most of the respondents stated that the lead special education teacher would seek them out and inform them of the student with the IEP and then the sped teacher would meet with the general education teacher at a set time to review the IEP.

All of the respondents, except for Respondent 1, stated that they read the IEPs for themselves. The question was do they read the IEPs themselves or wait for the special education teacher to read it for them or explain it to them. Respondents 2-12 quickly and emphatically answered they read the contents of the IEP for themselves. Respondents 4 and 11 stated their schools policy was that they also had to sign off on the fact that they had read their students' IEPs.

The question was also asked how comfortable did they feel incorporating the IEP into their daily lesson plans. Most of the respondents stated they felt comfortable implementing an IEP. Respondent 7, 11, and 12 stated they felt very comfortable implementing a child's IEP.

The question was asked if they had any input into developing a child's IEP. The answers ranged from no to very little. Respondent 4 stated that she has asked to have more input in developing a child's IEP but was told that the special education teacher writes the IEPs. Respondent 12 made the comment "the goals are done before I get the child (Interview 12, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 3)." Only respondent 11 gave any indication that she had input. According to 11 "I feel it is 50-50 on the IEP goals with the sped teacher and myself. I do about 50% of the goals, she does the rest (Interview 11, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 2).

The question was asked how IEP meetings had changed since each respondent began teaching. Respondent 1, 6 and 10 answered that the meetings have changed little since they began teaching. Respondent 2: "The meetings are a lot longer. A lot more people at the meetings. More emphasis on how not to get sued than what is best for the child. A lot different" (Interview 2, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 2).

Respondent 3 stated at first the meetings were the responsibility of the special education teacher. "It was totally their ballfield. Now the meetings are more of an equal, joint division of the parents and the school personnel, (Interview 3, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 4)."

Respondent 4 stated "I feel like when I first attended more action took place. More people took action to help the student. Now I feel like we continue to monitor and strategize instead of saying this isn't working let's do something else. I feel like there is a fear now for someone to take action. This fear is hindering the students" (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 5).

Respondent 5 stated, “I feel like there’s so much legality now. I feel like sometimes everyone is afraid and nobody wants to get sued. It bothers me that there are a lot of promises made in the IEP that really are not able to be actually carried out. It may be lack of manpower, not that it is anyone’s fault, and the system is not set up to succeed....sometimes the kids don’t get the services that they are supposed to get. I’m not sure parents are always aware of that” (Interview 5, interview, January 5, 2017, pgs. 3-4).

Respondent 7 stated a lot more documentation is required, a lot more documentation. Respondent 8 stated the meetings are longer with much more detail. She also stated much more emphasis is given to parents knowing their rights.

Respondent 9 also stated the meetings are more focused on the parents’ rights. She said “When I first attended IEP meetings it was more school lead where they would tell the parents what’s needed and now it is more collaborative. Parents have more say so and a lot of representatives come from different areas, advocates, and more looking at the child as a whole and more of the child’s rights than we would have had in years past” (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, pg. 5).

Respondent 11 stated there is more discussion of legislation and guidelines. She stated there needs to be more discussion on the need for common core guidelines and how to help the students meet them.

Respondent 12 stated that the IEP meetings are a lot longer now than when she first started attending the meetings.

Theme 8- Supports provided and supports needed

All the respondents were asked interview questions about the support they needed in order to teach students with disabilities in the classroom. The questions asked included:

- What supports, such as training and/or physical resources, do you need to be successful in teaching students with disabilities in your classroom?

In addition to the interview questions, the participants were also probed about their support levels.

- Who did they go to for assistance?
- How comfortable were they asking others for support?
- How much support did they get for differentiation?

All of the respondents stated that they received more support from the school level than the district level. They all reported that their resource teachers were very helpful and they all felt very comfortable asking the special education teachers for support. Many responded that their special education teachers were “wonderful” and tried to help as much as they could.

Respondents all also answered that they felt very comfortable asking their school administration for help or support. They all reported having reached out at some time and asked for support. All reported that their requests were fulfilled quickly either by receiving the physical supplies or resources they needed or by receiving advice or encouragement. All also reported receiving support from other general education teachers.

None of the respondents stated they felt comfortable asking their district administrators for support. None of the respondents stated they had ever reached out to the district for support.

Respondent 3 stated that the “chain of command” at her school was a big deal and that asking the principal for assistance would be “as high as I would go.” Respondent 7 also referred to a “chain of command” and stated no that she would not seek help from the district.

Respondent 4 stated “They (the district) only help or show up if a parent is suing us or they think they are going to sue us” (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 6).

The respondents were divided on support from the parents of their special needs students.

Respondents 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, and 12 stated yes they did receive support from the parents of the students with disabilities in their classrooms. Respondent 1 stated no, she did not receive support from the parents of disabilities in her classroom.

Respondent 2 and 10 stated sometimes they gets parental support. Respondent 6 stated she gets a “lot of parent support.”

Respondent 9 stated “No support from parents. I actually find that they will send them in without really giving you any background to what’s going on with their child. So they put them in your room and don’t really tell you exactly what is going on. I have new students come in and asked the parents if the child has any special needs and they tell me no and then I find out that they did” (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 6).

When asked about the supports they needed in order to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms, many of the respondents were very specific with their needs.

Respondent 1 stated, “I almost feel that I would benefit from shadowing the Special Ed teachers and seeing how they interact with the students and the activities they do. I learn from watching and doing than just reading about it and doing it. So I would like to see some kind of peer shadowing or something like that. That would be the best training for me. I had one on-line class in preservice, and I don’t believe it helps me meet the needs of special needs children in my classroom” (Interview 1, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 5).

Respondent 2 stated, “I wish they would offer more professional development for that. Come out to our schools. Let us see it” (Interview 2, January 5, 2017, pg. 2).

Respondent 5 stated, “I think manpower support I just feel like having more Special Ed teachers available to co-teach. I just feel like there isn’t enough manpower to really be able to do what the kids need to have done with them” (Interview 5, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 6 stated, “I think I need a suggestion and then maybe follow-up maybe once a month or every two months” (Interview 6, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 3).

Respondent 7 stated, “Just more time” (Interview 7, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 6).

Respondent 8 stated, “I feel overall that I need a co-teacher in everything I teach. We have fairly rigorous data growth scales in place to track progress. And time. More time.” (Interview 8, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 9 stated, “I guess if you had a behavior disorders child you would need.....yes the mindset training so that you know how to handle it appropriately....with all the lawsuits now a days...and I would imagine you would need CPR (training) depending on what’s going on in your room and what their disabilities are” (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 5).

Respondent 10 stated, “I wish they would offer more professional development for that. Come out to our schools. Let us see it.” (Interview 10, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 5).

Respondent 11 stated, “Greater training and discussion. More training on autism.” (Interview 11, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 12: “Support? I guess the first line of support you need is more communication with the special education teacher. More time, also, I guess. Not enough time, but I needed more support. With 28 students and five IEPs, I needed more support. I needed day to day coaching or watching. I really needed to see the special education teacher teach. I needed her to show me. I wish I could have watched the special education teacher do it” (Interview 12, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 5).”

Theme 9 – Modeling, shadowing, and differentiation

Respondents stated concerns about lack of training and modeling on how to work with students with disabilities as well as being able to observe someone modeling how general education teachers might differentiate to meet learning needs.

Respondent 3 stated “Being able to shadow or watch a special education teacher model lessons for the students would be beneficial” (Interview 3, interview, January 6, 2017, pg. 4).

Respondent 4 stated, “All gen ed teachers need more training. Show us what you are thinking. Let’s put a real class together and show us. Model it for us. We want to do this but show us how you want it done. Show us how to work together. Wouldn’t it be great to show others and help us be more confident to help these students succeed? Show us methods that really work and show us that they work and how they work” (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 5).

Additional respondent concerns

The last two questions asked by the researcher was what else would you like to add to this interview and if there was anything they would like for this researcher to know? Respondents 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 12 stated no to this question.

Respondent 5 stated, “I guess I’m just a little frustrated. Sometimes I just feel like our current system is not working, but it’s nobody’s fault. I have said this earlier. I see in my school many times the kids do not get the services that they are really supposed to have. It’s a legal issue, but I think that everyone kind of has to just gloss over it because a lot of it is the Special Ed teachers have to attend other meetings and meetings on top of meetings, on top of meetings. There is so much red tape I don’t know if the kids actually

benefit. Does that even make sense? It's very frustrating and I feel bad for the parents at these IEP meetings, because I feel like they are being promised all these things. I don't think people are lying to them. I think the intention is good, but it just doesn't seem to really happen like it is supposed to." (Interview 5, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 5).

Respondent 6 stated, "I think class sizes should be smaller in general, for general ed and special ed. Currently I'm teaching 16 students and I think that's a great size and could be smaller depending on the special ed population in the class that year. I feel horrible for special ed teachers because their paper work load is ridiculously inhumane. I think their workload is inhumane. I don't know about kids who are pulled out of a general education class. How much help are they really getting when they get pulled out for their individual instruction because the group is still too big? Even when they are pulled out of their class, their hour of reading is still too big, they are still not getting enough attention. Their hour of math is still too many kids, not enough support. They need more special ed teachers whether it's assistants or whatever. They aren't given enough time to help as much as they need to. Also, I think they need... once upon a time, about 14 years ago, they had a reading recovery program. I think 14 years is when it ended so prior to that they had a reading recovery program and as a para-pro I saw children really benefit from that program. They would be pulled out of their general ed class for 45 minutes a day, maybe every day of the week. Given intense reading instruction until they could get back up to grade level. They would rotate kids in and out of the program until they could everyone up to at least grade level. I feel like there is a ton of special ed kids in Georgia in general because of the poverty level in our area and those kids are just being pushed aside and not educated to their full potential because of class size and resources, and the structure of school and the structures of classrooms. We

are passing a bunch of people and pretending like they are being educated when they aren't really" (Interview 6, interview, January, 6, 2017, pgs. 4-5).

Respondent 9 stated, "...I believe this is an up and coming area and teachers need more support and preparation. Need to be exposed to more than what I was exposed to and provide for those rights and differentiation. Provide to meet the needs of so many different levels. There needs to be a lot more preparation beforehand and not during. Preparation early. Things have not worked and been successful." (Interview 9, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 8).

Respondent 10 stated, "I think they need to provide much more education in the district. We have much more sped students than we did. We need to have help. We need more information on autism. So many student have this and they have it and have not been diagnosed. We need mentors. We need someone to come and show us how to teach all these different students and their different needs." (Interview 10, personal interview, January 9, 2017, pg. 7).

Respondent 11 stated, "I guess experience is the master teacher. The greater number of years I have done this the better prepared I am; but there is always that monkey wrench that can throw you during the year. That monkey wrench being a child with specific, special needs that you may or may not know about or how to deal with" (Interview 11, interview, January 10, 2017, pg. 6).

Findings

1. Interview respondents reported pre-service preparation for general education teachers did not adequately prepare them to work with students with disabilities. Most respondents had only one exceptional child class in pre-service teacher preparation.

2. General education teachers who were interviewed reported a range of students with disabilities including those with less severe and extremely severe needs. Preparation for differentiating to meet the wide range of needs of Students with disabilities was not adequate for general education teachers.
3. In-service and post-service training for general education teachers was also limited. General education teacher in-service and post-service professional development was perceived as insufficient by teachers who were interviewed for the study.
4. Teachers stated the need to observe and see modeled the process of differentiating to meet student needs.
5. Interviewees reported that training for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was limited.
6. Pre-service preparation and in-service training on legislation was limited, especially with legislation affecting Students with disabilities such as IDEA.
7. Support for general education teachers working with students with disabilities was also limited according to the respondents. Support in terms of resources was generally provided by special education teachers.

Discussion about findings

Finding 1: Interview respondents reported pre-service preparation for general education teachers did not adequately prepare them to work with students with disabilities. Most respondents had only one exceptional child class in pre-service teacher preparation.

Findings from the interviews mirror studies done by Friend (2011). IDEA legislations specifically included guidelines that mandated steps to include the special

education teacher as well as the general education teacher, parents, and school administrators be participants in the Individual Education Plan process. The essence of the legislation, according to McLaughlin (2010) was that placement in the general education class be provided.

Finding 2: General education teachers who were interviewed reported a range of students with disabilities including those with less severe and extremely severe needs. Preparation for differentiating to meet the wide range of needs of Students with disabilities was not adequate for general education teachers.

The general education teacher needed a background of preparation for working with Students with disabilities. Inclusion in the general education class was to ensure that while students with disabilities had mandated services, additional supports and supplementary materials were to be included with the planning of the educational program and the participation of the general education teacher and special education teacher (Turnball, Turnball, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). As noted by Friend (2011) the intent was to eliminate the line between regular education and special education as teachers strived to follow the federal mandate of including students with special needs as much as possible in the regular education classroom.

Finding 3: In-service and post-service training for general education teachers was also limited. General education teacher in-service and post-service professional development was perceived as insufficient by teachers who were interviewed for the study.

Finding 4: Teachers stated the need to observe and see modeled the process of differentiating to meet student needs.

According to Forlin and Chambers (2011) pre-service teachers that had either received training or had observed students with disabilities in the classroom had more confidence in their own abilities to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Wogamon, 2013).

Finding 5: Interviewees reported that training for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was limited. While general education teachers were tasked about being a representative on an IEP committee, teachers acknowledged teacher preparation programs had not prepared them for the process, yet general education teachers were help responsible for adequate implementation.

Finding 6: Pre-service preparation and in-service training on legislation was limited, especially with legislation affecting Students with disabilities such as IDEA. Teachers reported knowing that parents would sue if IEP services were not provided. Wrightslaw (2015) reported cases where teachers and schools faced legal action as teachers and school administrators were not following IEPs. Teachers were concerned about being prepared to be a part of IEP meetings without sufficient knowledge about what was legally required as well as voiced concerns about needing to understand IDEA tenets.

Finding 7: Support for general education teachers working with Students with disabilities was also limited according to the respondents.

Support in terms of resources was generally provided by special education teachers. Richard and Clough's study (2004) conducted a study that encouraged the addition of adding inclusion to a general education student teacher's observation time. The authors reported pre-service teachers had better attitudes towards students with disabilities in their classrooms if they had actual experiences either working with students

or observing someone working with students with disabilities. Teachers' attitudes were improved because the exposure to differentiation techniques and the application of the techniques with special education students (Wogamon, 2013).

Finding 8: Teachers indicated a need to observe or shadow teachers to learn how to differentiate classroom lessons. Richard and Clough (2004) reported observations provided opportunity for pre-service to see how in-service teachers applied the strategies to meet individual needs of students. Participants requested more training, specifically with how to methods that could be modeled. Differentiation of lessons modeled for general education teachers was also requested. Respondents asked to see "lessons that work" (Interview 4, interview, January 5, 2017, pg. 5).

Inclusion of students with a range of disabilities necessitated preparation to provide a range of resources for all students. Nutter (2011) reported teachers felt inadequate to handle students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. While IDEA laws mandated compliance for placement, IDEA did not mandate training for general education teachers in teacher preparation programs.

Shurr and Bouck (2013) reported disabilities could affect a child's academics, cognitive thinking skills, mobility, and daily living skills; the extent these disabilities had on a child runs the gamut from minor to debilitating (IDEA, 2010). The general education teacher was responsible to make sure that the academic needs of all children were met; however the academic needs of students with disabilities were incredibly diverse as these children were able, or unable, to access the curriculum. The diversity includes the ranges of disabilities such as children with autism and children with specific learning disabilities.

Summary

The information gathered from the 12 interviews answered the three questions posed in this research. None of the 12 elementary, general education teachers perceived themselves to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Only three interviewees perceived that they felt fairly well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The remaining nine teachers stated they perceived themselves to not be prepared at all to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The interviewees stated that their levels of pre-service special education classes did not increase their perceptions of preparedness in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom and that the in-service and professional development special education classes they took also did nothing to increase their perception of their level of preparedness to teach students with disabilities within the general education setting.

Other findings include participants' perceived lack of modeling for and working with special education students. Included in this was the participants' unfamiliarity with special education law and their involvement in the development of students with disabilities' IEPs. The participants' need for more instruction and modeling differentiating for diverse learners in their classrooms was also a finding from this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Legislation in recent years changed classes in the United States. Self-contained classes, classes that once held any child with special needs were not as common. These classrooms now usually contained students with significant learning and developmental needs and severe and profound students that required consistent medical care as well as education services. More and more of general education classes were populated by students with Autism, Learning disabilities, Cerebral Palsy, Deaf-Hard of Hearing, ADHD, Blindness, and many of the disabilities listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Acts of 2004 and 2010.

For the purpose of this study, 12 current elementary, general education teachers were interviewed on their perceptions of how prepared they perceived themselves to be to teach students with disabilities in their classes. The majority of these participants answered they do not perceive themselves to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education classes. The participants stated that the pre-service classes taken as teacher candidates had not prepare them to teach students with disabilities in their classes nor had the in-service, post-service, or professional development they participated in as certified teachers prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes.

Participants were asked what they needed in order to feel prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education classes. The answers included more instruction on differentiation and more time to collaborate with the special education teacher. Several of the participants stated they needed special education teacher to model

differentiation in their classes. The desire to shadow the special education teacher in order to observe differentiation was expressed by several of the participants. The participants of this study wanted a demonstration of how to differentiate within their classes. All of the participants in this study indicated they were very comfortable working with the special education teachers at their various schools, but indicated that there was not enough time to meet with these special educators. The need for collaboration was expressed by many of the participants.

The need for more instruction on school law and special education law emerged as the participants were asked various questions on legal requirements for students with disabilities in the inclusion classrooms. The majority of the participants in this study were not familiar with special education law. Many did not demonstrate a familiarity with school law. All knew they were required to sign students with special needs' IEPs and knew they were to implement the IEP but many stated there was a lack of involvement in the writing and the development of the IEPs.

The table below displays the results of this study on what the participants wanted but did not receive.

Table 6: Participants wants and what they did not receive:

What the participants wanted	What the participants received
Assistance with differentiation	No assistance with differentiation
Opportunities to shadow special educator	No opportunities to shadow
Occasions to observe differentiation in action	No observation opportunities
Time to collaborate with special educators	No collaboration time
More input on writing IEP	Limited input in the IEP process

This study was a confirmatory analysis. The concepts of this study were not new. The findings from this study supported the findings from prior research including Parreira (2015); Wilkerson (2012); Franklin (2011); Cagney (2009); and Oakford & Hastings (2003). The Board of Regents should examine the data presented in this research and decide if changes need to be made in the pre-service of teacher candidates. It was also recommended that district school superintendents and principals scrutinize the data presented in this research and decide if changes need to be made in allowing more time for general educators and special educators to collaborate. This collaboration time could also include more opportunities for general educators to observe the special educators model differentiation within the inclusion classes. School superintendents and principals could also examine the data and decide if more in-service and professional development opportunities need to be offered to teachers.

Statement of the problem revisited

School districts were required by IDEA to include all students with disabilities within the general education classroom. IDEAs 2004 and 2010 outlined the steps necessary to include these students with disabilities and to insure their inclusion in the general education class. General education teachers were tasked with the responsibility and the accountability for providing educational services for students with special needs. Sass and Feng (2012) reported that with the passage of IDEA 2004, the terms least restrictive environment and mainstreaming became almost synonymous, especially in the special education environment. In 2010, IDEA 2010 changed; inclusion became an interchangeable word in the special education and regular education classroom (Shaw, Keenan, Maddaus, & Bannerjee, 2010). Alexander and Alexander (2009) stated that the goal of IDEA 2010 was to blur the line between regular education and special education;

general education teachers were tasked to follow the federal mandate of including students with special needs as much as possible in the regular education classes . Placement in the general education classroom placed the responsibility of implementing inclusion mainly upon the shoulders of the general education teachers (Woolworth & Osgood, 2007); however, IDEA mandates had not included training of general education teachers to prepare for students with special needs within their general education classrooms.

Purpose of the study

The researcher proposed to study the perceptions of elementary school general education teachers as to whether or not they were prepared to teach students with disabilities in classes. Three questions were developed to gather perceptions of general education teachers working with special education students in their classes.

The overarching research question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

1. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?
2. To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach students with disabilities in their classes?

Methodology and Analysis of Data

The researcher used a qualitative inquiry method in order to access the perceptions of general education elementary school teachers to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The researcher employed purposive sampling to survey a

select group of general education teachers who worked in inclusive classes, or classes that include students with disabilities. The researcher utilized interviews in order to obtain answers to the research question by having participants share their answers and experiences.

Summary of findings and discussion

Overarching Research Question: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that they are prepared to teach students with disabilities?

Based on the information provided in interviews, none of the 12 respondents stated that they perceived themselves to be well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education elementary classes. Only one-fourth of the participants stated they felt fairly well-prepared to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. The remaining three-fourths stated they did not feel prepared at all to teach students with disabilities in their general education elementary classes.

Research Question 1: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that pre-service training prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?

None of the participants perceived that pre-service special education class prepared them for students with disabilities in their classroom. Approximately 83% of the participants reported taking the exceptional child class while in college working on their teaching degree. When asked if the one exceptional child class helped them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes, all participants responded negatively.

The literature on course cases established that general education teachers provide an education to both exceptional and non-exceptional students; students must be provided

a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004, 2010; Rhim & McLaughlin, 2007). Specifically *Mills v Board of Education* (1972) established schools must be inclusive with the provision of FAPE. The definition of free in regards to schools supported the principle of zero reject. Zero reject means that all students with disabilities had the right to be provided an appropriate education as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment (Friend, 2011). The education was mandatory and provided by the local school district despite the expense (Friend, 2011).

Light v Parkway C-2 (1994), *Steinberg v Weast* (2001) and *Reese v Board of Education Bismark* (2002) reiterated the necessity of placement; students with disability had the right to be placed in a general education class with non-exceptional peers. IDEA (2010) states, “Each state must establish procedures to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special education, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education at environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (20 U.S.C. 1412(5)(B)).

With increasing numbers of students in general education classes, general education teachers were responsible for all students as well as students with a range of disabilities. General education teachers were additionally part of the IEP team that wrote goals for each student with disabilities. While major responsibilities for teaching all students was broad and usually curriculum based, an additional responsibility was placed on general education teachers. They had to not only attend IEP meetings and understand the strategies necessary to assist students with disabilities with learning, but also they had

to be signers on the students' IEPs, and with their signatures became legally responsible for providing the services designated on the IEP documents.

Research Question 2: To what extent do general education teachers perceive that post-service, in-service, or professional development prepared them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes?

Participants answered post-service, in-service, or professional development had not prepared the participants to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes. Of the 12 research participants, only 66% had any post-service, in-service, or professional development special education.

One participant reported taking an exceptional child class as professional development requirement. The participant stated that she had not taken this class in pre-service years and was required to take an exceptional child class to keep certification. Of the classes taken in-service, the participants reported were classes concerned with inclusion training and co-teaching training. When probed about post-service, in-service, or professional development classes, preparing them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their classes, the response from all the participants was negative. The teachers who participated in post-service, in-service, or professional development stated they still did not perceive themselves prepared to teach students with disabilities in the classroom. The majority of the respondents stated that they had taken in-service classes on co-teaching but that these classes did not prepare them for the strategies they would need in order to teach the diversity of learning skills and needs of students with disabilities in their general education classes.

Researchers (Lang, 2014; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010) reported flaws in teacher education preparation programs specifically with the lack of preparation for general education teachers to teach students with disabilities. It was necessary that general education teachers be instructed how to teach students with disabilities (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). A number have studies reported the inadequacy of teacher education preparation programs to prepare general education teachers to effectively teach students with disabilities (Allington, McGill-Franzen, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007), reporting that many general education teachers did not any receive special education training during their preservice years (Feustal, 2015). Thus, according to Feustal (2015), McCray and McHatton (2011), Mumba & Chitityo (2008), general education teachers may not be equipped with the knowledge needed to support students with disabilities in their general education classrooms.

The training of special education teachers and general education teachers according to researchers (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Rosas & Campbell, 2010; Wogamon, 2013; Mitchell, 2014) was different, general education teachers exhibited more content knowledge, while special education teachers possessed more of the strategies needed to teach students with disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Rosas & Campbell, 2010; Wogamon, 2013; Mitchell, 2014).

Findings

1. Interview respondents reported pre-service preparation for general education teachers did not adequately prepare them to work with students with disabilities. Most respondents had only one exceptional child class in pre-service teacher preparation. Interviewees stated overall that they did not feel adequately prepared

to meet the needs of students with disabilities General education teachers need to be prepared to work with all students in their classes.

2. General Education Teacher Preparation Programs required only one exceptional child class addressing how to work with students with disabilities. Teachers need more thorough preparation in teacher education programs.
3. General education teachers have the responsibility for working with a range of students with disabilities in general education classes and need to know more about students with different types of disabilities in general education classes and need to know more about students with different types of disabilities in order to meet their needs. Teacher preparation programs should prepare students in teacher preparation programs to work with all students.
4. General education teachers who were interviewed reported a range of students with disabilities including those with less severe and extremely severe needs. Preparation for differentiating to meet the wide range of needs of Students with disabilities was not adequate for general education teachers.
5. In-service and post-service training for general education teachers was also limited. General education teacher in-service and post-service professional development was perceived as insufficient by teachers who were interviewed for the study.
6. Teachers stated the need to observe and see modeled the process of differentiating to meet student needs.
7. Interviewees reported that training for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) was limited.

8. Pre-service preparation and in-service training on legislation was limited, especially with legislation affecting Students with disabilities such as IDEA.
9. Support for general education teachers working with students with disabilities was also limited according to the respondents. Support in terms of resources was generally provided by special education teachers.

Implications

1. With the range of students with disabilities in general education classes, college and university teacher preparation programs should provide a broad base of classes to prepare general education teachers to work with students with lesser needs to students with more severe needs.
2. Preparation programs need to include opportunities for teachers to observe teachers working successfully to differentiate.

Policy makers at the state and district and school level needed establish policies to promote in-service and post service professional development to ensure that general education teachers' concerns about working with students with disabilities were addressed.

1. District and school administrators should provide on-going professional development opportunities for general education teachers working with students with disabilities.
2. Opportunities for general education teachers to participate in in-service and post service training to learn how to model for the students with disabilities in their classes should be provided.

3. Resources necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities in general education classes should be provided so that teachers can follow Individual Education Plan requirements for differentiation.
4. District and school administrators should have ongoing professional development that provides information on school law; in particular, general education teachers should be provided information on special education law.

Conclusions:

- General education classes were inclusive, meaning that classes serve a range of students from lesser to those with severe needs. Teacher preparation programs should prepare teachers to meet the needs of all students including students with lesser and more severe disabilities.
- General education teachers had little or none in-service, post service training and training opportunities to address their needs in working with students with disabilities. In-service and post service training opportunities should be provided on an on-going basis to ensure general education teachers are prepared to serve needs of special education students.
- General education teachers were not offered opportunities to see differentiation, specifically shadowing and modeling. Teacher preparation programs should include modeling, chances to shadow master teachers working with students with disabilities, and opportunities to learn about and see how differentiation is done successfully by general and special education teachers. Participants stated they felt very comfortable asking the special educators at their school for assistance. All of the participants

stated they had reached out to their special educators for assistance and many stated they had done this often. When asked what they most needed help with from their special education teachers, all responded, “differentiation.”

- Differentiation was tailoring a curriculum with strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom (Tomlinson & Moon, 2014).

Participants stated the need for more strategies in order to present the curriculum and lesson plans on every individual child’s level. Assessing general education teacher professional development needs should be on-going. Districts and schools needed to assure that general education teachers have opportunities for professional development.

- Teacher preparation programs as well as school and districts need to query in-service and post service teachers about needs and provide programming to meet the needs expressed by teachers.
- While general education teachers were responsible for the Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities, there is limited training for general education teachers on their responsibilities as part of the IEP development process. Teacher preparation programs and districts and schools needed to provide training to general education teachers about the Individual Education Plan processes. Training needed to include the legal responsibilities for teachers to follow the IEP.
- General education teachers were legally responsible for teaching students with disabilities but had limited training about school laws and emerging and new legislation. Only 10 out of the 12 respondents stated that they

ever talked about special education law with their administration and/or their special education teachers.

- General education teachers had support from special education teachers; however general education teachers felt access to teaching resources was limited. Schools and districts should ensure general education teachers were supported by special education teachers and were provided resources such as manipulatives, lesson plans, and encouragement.

Limitations

The sample size for this study was within the framework of purposive sampling, but was small. The 12 respondents were not a representative sample for generalizations across the board for the perception of the preparedness for all elementary general education teachers. This study did not generalize to larger populations. The small sample size was conducive for qualitative, in-depth interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study could be replicated with a larger group sample. A larger group would allow more exploration about teacher preparation programs on a broader scale and provide more data to support the findings of this study.
2. Future research on teacher preparation programs should include an investigation of classes offered in school law, and in particular classes in special education law offerings.

3. A mixed-methods study could investigate practices in in-service and post-service professional development offerings for general education teachers who serve students with disabilities. This proposed study could establish a baseline for what is currently offered in teacher preparation programs and what general education teachers perceive should be offered.

Concluding thoughts

The numbers of students with disabilities in general education classes are increasing. General education teachers need strategies to differentiate for their students. The findings from this study include that most of the participants in this research did not perceive themselves to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education classes. The level of pre-service special education classes did not, according to the respondents, prepare them to teach the range of students with disabilities in their general education classes. The level of post-service, in-service or professional development also did not provide additional preparation for teaching students with disabilities in their general education classes.

The majority of the respondents stated there was a lack of modeling for and working with special education students. Many of the respondents were unfamiliar with special education legislation and law. Respondents also stated they perceived they did not have a background of information about Individual Education Plans.

Most respondents stated they needed help with differentiation in order to meet the needs of diverse learners in their classes. The need for lessons in differentiation for the teachers was stated in various ways by the majority of the respondents. The respondents stating the need for more lessons in differentiation stated they needed

someone to model the lessons for them. The respondents wanted to see, to visualize how differentiation works within a class of varying learning styles.

Overall, all respondents noted that more emphasis was needed in instruction for pre-service teacher candidates. Respondents indicated they felt a sense of being unprepared to work with students with disabilities while at the same time had a growing number of students with disabilities in their classes. Finally, respondents indicated teacher preparation candidates need more special education training in the form of strategies, differentiation and special education law to potentially increase the perception of preparedness of general educators to teach students with disabilities in general education classes.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A

Date: 8/22/16
Protocol Number: 16-102
Protocol Title: Educational Research
Principal Investigator: Susan Elder
Co-Principal Investigator: Pamela Lemoine

Dear Susan Elder:

Representatives of the Columbus State University Institutional Review Board have reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the research project poses minimal risk to subjects and qualifies for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110.

Conditional approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for approximately 12 subjects pending the approval from the listed outside performance site(s). Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu or [\(706\) 507-8634](tel:7065078634).

You must submit a Final Report Form to the IRB once the project is completed or within 12 months from the date of this letter. If the study extends beyond 1 year, you must submit a Project Continuation Form to the IRB. Both forms are located on the CSU IRB website (<https://aa.columbusstate.edu/research/irb/>). The completed form should be submitted to irb@columbusstate.edu. Please note that either the Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator can complete and submit this form to the IRB. Failure to submit this required form could delay the approval process for future IRB applications.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,
Amber Dees, IRB Coordinator

Institutional Review Board
Columbus State University

APPENDIX B

**COLUMBUS STATE**

UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Susan Fuller Elder, a doctoral student in the College of Education and Health Profession at Columbus State University. Advised by Dr. Pamela Lemoine, Assistant Professor, at Columbus State University.

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to investigate the perceived preparedness of elementary, general education teachers to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

II. Procedures:

The researcher will gain permission to interview 12 participants in the middle Georgia area via an email. The researcher will explain the research process in the email. Participants will have seven (7) days to sign and return the participation agreement. A follow-up letter will be mailed if no response by the deadline

During the first phase of the study, the voluntary participants will be e-mailed a survey that will contain six questions. One of the questions will seek permission to interview the individual and contact information.

During the second phase, the researcher will conduct the interviews. The interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or via telephone. The interviews will last approximately one hour and will involve questions and probes. The interviews will be recorded on a recording device. Participants will be reminded that the interview is recorded and kept confidential. The recordings will be stored electronically on the recording device and passcode protected.

During the third phase, the recorded data will be transcribed, read and re-read, coded and identification of common and uncommon themes.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:

There is no possible risks during this study. Surveys and interview data will be confidential and all interviews will be held in private with only the researcher and the interviewee.

IV. Potential Benefits:

The benefits of this study include; identifying areas of need for more training and/or resources for general education teachers to teach students with disabilities. By identifying any areas of needs this may lead to improved pre-service and/or in-service special education training for general education teachers. This data may also guide districts into considering policy changes in order to increase special education training for regular education teachers. By doing this, all stakeholder benefit from more efficient, effective inclusion programs.

V. Costs and Compensation:

There is no compensation for any of the participants in this study.

VI. Confidentiality:

All data collected will be kept under lock and key in the researcher's home office and the researcher is the only person who has access. The recording of the interviews will be stored on a computer tablet with a passcode only known to the researcher. The data will remain stored for a period of one year and will then be destroyed/deleted by the researcher.

VII. Withdrawal:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study

at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Susan Fuller Elder or elder_susan1@columbusstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@cohimbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

APPENDIX C

Survey Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your contact information?
3. How many years teaching experience do you have?
4. What Pre-service special education classes have you had?
5. What In-service special education classes have you had?
6. Would you be interested in participating in an interview?

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions:

1. How prepared do you perceive yourself to be in teaching students with disabilities in the classroom?

Probe: How long did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

Probe: What inspired you to get into teaching profession?

Probe: Was teaching general education your first choice? If not, what was your first choice?

Probe: What is your original certification?

Probe: How many years have you taught students with disabilities in your classroom? Probe: What population of disabilities have you taught in your classroom?

2. Did your level of pre-service prepare you to teach the range of special needs students currently in your classroom?

Probe: What were the major factors that lead you to your current feeling of preparedness?

3. Has your level of post-service training prepared you to teach the range of special needs in your classroom?

4. In your district, what is the process used to involve general education teachers in the implementation of the IEP requirements for a student with disabilities?

Probe: What is the process in your district to alert a general education teacher a student with an IEP is in their classroom?

Probe: Do you wait for the general education teacher to alert you or do you seek that teacher out to discuss the child with special needs?

Probe: How often do you meet with the special education teacher?

Probe: How does the special education teacher communicate with you to let you know a child with an IEP is in your class?

Probe: How much input do you feel you give to helping develop a student's IEP?

5. What special education training did you have in your pre-service years?

Probe: Was taking these classes self-initiated or required?

6. Did preservice or in-service professional development allow you to meet the needs of students who might range from mild to moderate disabilities?

Probe: To what extent have pre-service or in-service professional development helped you to apply modifications and accommodations in your classroom?

7. What special education training have you had since your initial teacher certification?

Probe: Was taking these classes self-initiated or required?

8. What special education training does your school district offer?

Probe: If they do offer special education training, how often do they offer them?

Probe: How do they disseminate information about these trainings?

Probe: How often do you attend special education trainings?

Probe: Are trainings offered during the school day or after school hours?

9. How have the changes in federal requirements for special education students changed your teaching?

Probe: How do you get information on special education legislation?

Probe: What do you know about IDEA 2010 and No Child Left Behind with regard to special legislation?

10. How much preservice and in-service preparation have you been offered concerning federal mandates for inclusion as well as special education requirements for general education teachers to participate in the IEP process?
- Probe: How often do you and the lead special education teacher discuss Special Education law?
- Probe: How often are district meetings offered on Special Education Law?
- Probe: How often do you attend district meetings on Special Education law or requirements?
11. As a general education teacher, do you read your students with disabilities' IEPs or do you wait for the special education teacher to provide you information?
- Probe: How confident do you feel in incorporating a student's IEP goals into your teaching?
- Probe: How have IEP meetings changed from when you first attended to the more recent meetings you have attended?
12. What supports, such as training and/or physical resources, do you need to be successful in teaching students with disabilities in your classroom?
- Probe: Do you receive more support from the school level or the district level?
- Probe: How are your needs met?
- Probe: How does the resource teacher help?
- Probe: How comfortable do you feel asking the special education teacher for assistance? Probe: How comfortable do you feel asking your school administration for assistance? Probe: How comfortable do you feel asking your school district for assistance?

Probe: How often have you ever reached out to any of these people for assistance?

Probe: How were your requests fulfilled?

13. As a general education teacher working toward meeting student achievement goals, in what ways do you feel that you are provided enough support to meet student needs? Probe: How much support do you need for differentiation?

Probe: How much support do you receive from other general education teachers?

14. What were the major factors that lead you to your feeling of preparedness?

Probe: What in your background helps you feel prepared?

Probe: Is a family member or someone or something in your environment that helps you feel prepared?

15. How have you ensured the students with special needs get the support they need?

Probe: How do you assess the academic performance of students with special needs in your classroom?

Probe: How do you assess the socialization of students with special needs in your classroom?

Probe: How do you document your interactions with the students with special needs in your classroom?

Probe: How is your documentation of your general education students different from your students with special needs?

16. Do you receive support (encouragement, strategies, and resources) in any other ways than what we have talked about?

Probe: Do you receive support from the parents of the students with special needs in your classroom?

Probe: Do you get support from community members?

Probe: Do you receive support from any professional organizations?

17. What else would you like to add to this interview? Is there anything you would like for me to know?

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