


2017

Role Ambiguity: Defining the Elusive Role of the Special Education Teacher Who Works in Inclusive Settings

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ROLE AMBIGUITY: DEFINING THE ELUSIVE ROLE OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHER WHO WORKS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Education and Human Performance
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2017

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of special education teachers who worked in inclusive settings. Given the increasing number of students with disabilities receiving special education services in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), there is a critical need to understand the dynamic role of a special education teacher who works in inclusive settings. Federal mandates have required special education teachers working in inclusive settings to rethink their roles (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson, 2011) and restructure their approach to providing specially-designed services. Further, these roles are dependent on those who interpret and implement policy and access to finite resources. This study used a phenomenological research method to examine the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants ($N = 7$). A thematic analysis resulted in five overarching themes. The five themes included: (a) supporting students with disabilities within a support facilitation model; (b) role ambiguity of the special education teacher; (c) the lack of roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS framework; (d) the changing role of collaboration and communication; and (e) the challenges impacting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study exposed the multiple facets of school and district policies that directly affected special educators' roles and responsibilities, as well as the emergence of a new role as a support facilitator.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Scott, and three intelligent, spirited, and beautiful children, Collin, Anna, and Tobias. Each of you challenged me to be who I am and without your love and support I would not be able to do the things I do. You made sacrifices over the last three years so I could see this journey through to the end, and for that I am thankful. I hope that I have led by example and that you too have a lifelong pursuit of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was successfully completed with the enduring support of those around me who pushed me to achieve beyond my reach, who challenged me to see the world differently, and who stood by me through this journey. I owe each of you a wealth of gratitude for believing in me and not letting me give up. Thank you for pushing me beyond my limits.

To my husband, Scott, I would not have had the confidence to pursue my Ph.D. without your support. I know you made sacrifices for me to fulfill this dream. To my three smart and driven children, Collin, Anna, and Tobias: I cannot tell you how much I love you and how much each of you mean to me. Thank you all for putting up with my anxiety and bad moods – I know I did not make this easy for any of us. It has been a challenging three years, and every day you reminded me why I began this journey. You each gave me the strength I needed to see this journey through. I can only hope to one day return the favor.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my chair, my mentor, my number one supporter, Dr. Mary Little. Dr. Little has served as my advisor since I entered my Master's program at the University of Central Florida in 2010. Since that time, she has patiently supported me through the dissertation process and guided me through life changing challenges. Without her continued support and persistent guidance, this dream would not have been possible. Her endless positivity was a guiding force throughout this journey, and her friendship has been instrumental in my successful completion of this doctoral program.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my invaluable committee members, Dr. Suzanne Martin, Dr. Cynthia Pearl, and Dr. David Boote. A sincere thank you to each of you for your expertise, time, and support, which are not limited to this dissertation. Each of you has enriched my thoughts and understanding of the world around me. Thank you, Dr. Suzanne Martin, for your mentorship and sharing your passion for improving the lives of all students. You modeled great teaching and deepened my dedication to social justice and equity. Dr. Cynthia Pearl, thank you for challenging my thinking and helping me question my assumptions and views. Your dedication has helped me be the scholar I am today. To Dr. Boote, I thank you for our candid conversations. Your expertise has contributed heavily to my knowledge of effectively carrying out a qualitative study. Finally, thank you to every teacher, professor, and school professional who has been a part of my life whether big or small, you are why I am who I am today.

Thank you to amazing and brilliant minds of our UCF faculty. Thank you, Dr. Lisa Dieker, for affording me the opportunity to pursue my Ph.D. Project LEAD was a gift and experience. I will be forever thankful. Dr. Martha Lue-Stewart, Dr. Maria Reyes, Dr. Wilfred Wienke, Dr. Matt Marino, and Dr. Trey Vasquez, I am thankful for the opportunity to learn from each of you. Through your passion and dedication to the field and to your students, I was able to expand my knowledge. Thank you, Dr. Jillian Gourwitz for being a friend and mentor as we worked together on the National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative (NUSELI). I learned so much from you and am grateful for our friendship over the years.

To my cohort and fellow doctoral scholars who joined this journey with me three years ago, thank you for your support, laughter, and friendship. To my momma scholar friends, Dr. Taylor Bousfield and Dr. Karin Fisher, you have made this past year especially amazing. I appreciated being able to turn to each of you when I most needed a cheerleader. You are both truly blessings in my life. I cannot express what your calls, texts, and messages have meant. A special thank you to Alex Davies and Angelica Fulchini. Alex, you made this journey brighter with your sense of humor. You were gracious enough to take part in my dissertation and conduct my bracketing interview, and for your help I am thankful. Angelica, your participation in my dissertation as a peer-debriefer was selfless and appreciated more than you know.

Above all, thank you to the dedicated and passionate special education teachers who took time from their busy schedules to share their stories with me as part of this dissertation. The future of our nation is in your classrooms and you all work so hard with little recognition. You have influenced the lives of so many children and families and have left your mark on this generation. Thank you for all that you do.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years, the combined efforts of advocates, parents, educators, and legislators have shaped the field of special education and led to sweeping changes designed to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for approximately 6 million students with disabilities educated in the public school system (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These sustained efforts have been instrumental in enacting federal initiatives and educational reforms designed to ensure students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) while providing access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) delivered by qualified and knowledgeable special educators who implement evidence-based instruction, data-driven interventions, and specially-designed supports and services for students with disabilities. Federal legislation, beginning with the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975)*, focused on gaining and providing access and equity in education for all students, including students with disabilities, who were historically segregated within the public education system (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Decades of continued and sustained advocacy and research led to multiple reauthorizations of *EAHCA*, with the most recent reauthorization in 2004, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)*. Each reauthorization of *EAHCA* aimed to improve access to FAPE and remove barriers that continued despite earlier versions of the legislation. Further, evaluation measures for students with disabilities are now included in federal legislation historically focused on general education initiatives (e.g., *No Child Left Behind, NCLB, 2001*; *Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA, 2015*).

The intentions of legislative changes were to address issues in equity and access that persisted for decades. *IDEA* recognized “a more equitable allocation of resources is essential for the Federal Government to meet its responsibility to provide educational opportunity for all individuals” (Section 601(C)(7), *IDEA*) and that the “Federal Government must be responsive to the growing needs of an increasingly diverse society” (Section 601(C)(10)(A), *IDEA*). *IDEA* also cited studies that “have documented apparent discrepancies in the levels of referral and placement of limited English proficient children in special education” (Section 601(C)(11)(B), *IDEA*) and that “more minority children continue to be served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority children in the general school population” (Section 601(C)(12)(B), *IDEA*). A problem-solving Response to Intervention (RtI; also known as Multi-Tiered System of Supports, MTSS) model was developed and implemented to address these discrepancies with the focus on instruction and intervention rather than student discrepancies and eligibility criteria (Hollenbeck & Patrikakou, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008).

The intent of the RtI/MTSS model was to identify students who were at-risk or not meeting expectations, provide early intervention services, determine a student’s response to evidence-based instruction, and guide service delivery for students with persistent needs (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). Further, Burns, Jacob, and Wagner (2008) asserted the purpose and original intent of MTSS was to: (a) address the inequities in special education for disadvantaged and minority students; (b) reduce the number of students referred to special education as these students may not have a disability but instead need scientific, research-based instruction; (c) replace the previous “wait to fail” model which placed students

significantly behind their peers; and (d) ensure that highly qualified teachers provided all students with evidence-based instruction. Federal legislation incentivized schools to implement “pre-referral interventions to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address their learning needs” (Section 601(C)(5), *IDEA*).

However, despite these initiatives, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) reported 40 percent of fourth grade students were at or above proficiency on grade level assessments in reading. The NAEP reading scores for fourth grade students identified as students with disabilities were significantly lower, with 12 percent of students with disabilities performing at or above proficiency. Sixty-seven percent of students with disabilities scored below the basic level of reading (NAEP, 2015). These scores indicate students with disabilities continue to struggle to comprehend text, a skill necessary to be an effective reader (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2012). Therefore, prevention and early intervention at the early elementary level are critical. Students who do not “acquire key reading skills in the first two years of schooling suffer adverse effects that are very difficult to overcome in later years” (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2007, p. 147), signaling a critical need for early intervention for struggling readers.

Additionally, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) attempts to address the need for increased rigor through the adoption of academic standards aligned with college and career goals while concomitantly stressing the importance of accountability for teachers and schools. Increasingly rigorous educational standards were developed in an effort to prepare students for a dynamic workforce and a highly-competitive and global 21st Century

workplace (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015). Whether states adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or created academic standards unique to their state, there has been an emphasis on standards reflecting the content knowledge required in various disciplines, as well as the intention to develop skills to communicate, collaborate, and think critically (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2006; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015). These standards-based and accountability-focused reforms have implications for students with and without disabilities who continue to struggle with basic reading skills (Elish-Piper, 2016).

Such mandates and literacy initiatives have placed students with significant and persistent reading difficulties at a disadvantage as they continue to struggle to close the ever-widening gap between them and their peers (Elish-Piper, 2016). *ESSA* legislation included language to “increase the ability of teachers to effectively teach children with disabilities, including children with significant cognitive disabilities, and English learners”, the use of “multi-tier systems of support and positive behavioral intervention and supports” was necessary to help students “meet the challenging State academic standards” (Section 2103(b)(3)(F)). Elish-Piper (2016) stated, “We must set high standards for all students, but we must provide equally high support to help them reach those standards” (p. 111). This is increasingly critical since reading proficiency is directly correlated with academic success, high school graduation, and college attainment (Hough et al., 2013). Literacy not only remains a prerequisite for educational success, but students’ success is also dependent on their ability to be literate in multiple disciplines (Zygouris-Coe, 2012).

Decades of literacy initiatives and research have focused on improving outcomes for struggling readers (Cassidy, Ortlieb, & Grote-Garcia, 2016). Due to the significance of literacy for student success and outcomes across disciplines, research has supported students receiving intervention at the first sign of difficulty (Lose, 2007; Lose et al., 2007; O'Connor, Bocian, Beach, Sanchez, & Flynn, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2007; Schwartz, Schmitt, & Lose, 2012). Further, students who fall behind in literacy may never catch up to their peers (Griffin, Burns, & Snow, 1998; Reynolds et al., 2007). Therefore, early intervention using a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) to support struggling students warrants continued and sustained focus to assure all students are college and career ready upon graduation (Cassidy et al., 2016).

Special education teachers have historically provided specially-designed instruction and intervention to students with disabilities specifically tailored to their individual needs (Batsche, 2014). The role of the special education teacher to differentiate instruction to meet student needs is increasingly important due to the fact that teaching practices in the general education classroom have long been characterized by undifferentiated, whole group instruction (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005). The disconnect between undifferentiated teaching practices and individual student instructional needs resulted in students struggling to meet grade level standards (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Zumeta, 2008). Specially-designed instruction and services could be accessed only after students were identified for special education allowing the gap between them and their peers to widen (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005) until identification and eligibility for special education services in some categories (e.g., specific learning disabilities) required a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic

performance (e.g., *Education for All Handicapped Children Act, EAHCA, 1975*). Several researchers (Aaron, Joshi, Gooden, & Bentum, 2008; Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003; Turse & Albrecht, 2015) opined that this discrepancy model resulted in students falling significantly behind their peers in the general education curriculum before interventions would be provided. In some cases, students whose needs were not met through typical instructional practices of the general education classroom could experience failure well into the upper elementary grades before their needs would be addressed (Fuchs et al., 2008).

The current re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) legislation, *ESSA*, included language describing a Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) framework designed to provide supports and interventions with increasing intensity for struggling students in the general education setting (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015; ESSA, 2015). MTSS is a multi-tiered framework for providing early intervention that utilizes evidence-based practices to address the specific and unique academic or behavioral needs of all students (Barrio, Lindo, Combes, & Hovey, 2015; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Early intervention is key to the process and reduces the occurrence of students falling significantly behind their peers (Cassidy et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2007; Torgeson, 2002). Further, MTSS is a cyclical, problem-solving model that begins with problem identification, problem analysis, intervention, solution planning and implementation; and ends with evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention provided through continued and sustained progress monitoring to address the needs of an individual student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Harn, Fritz & Berg, 2014; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The intent of

the MTSS process is for students with and without disabilities to be provided with the supports necessary for access to the general education curriculum (Batsche, 2014).

While many factors contribute to student outcomes, instructional quality remains a dominant factor in student performance (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) and has a stronger correlation with student achievement than class size or school spending (Beare, Marshall, Torgeson, Traez, & Chiero, 2012). Student performance and content knowledge are directly influenced by teachers' instructional practices (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Pressley et al., 2001; Rivkin et al., 2005). Therefore, improving teacher quality could lead to improved student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Rockoff, 2004) since teachers are directly responsible for evaluating and implementing evidence-based instructional methods (Little & Houston, 2003a). McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) stressed "being taught by less effective teachers can have a devastating effect on achievement outcomes for students" (p. 296). Pre-service and in-service teachers need to have access to and experience with the most current research- and evidence-based instructional strategies, especially when working with students who have extensive support needs (Copeland, Keefe, Calhoon, Tanner, & Park, 2011).

General and special education teachers are required by federal legislation (e.g., *IDEIA*, *NCLB*, *ESSA*) to use evidence-based and research-backed practices for instruction and intervention (Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2008). Evidence-based instructional practices, termed scientifically-based practices in *NCLB* legislation, were defined as "the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid

knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (*NCLB*, 2001, Title IX, Part A, Section 9101[37]). Cook and Cook (2011) further described evidence-based instructional practices as instructional techniques that meet a rigorous, prescribed set of research criteria and have been shown to have a statistically significant impact on student achievement when implemented with fidelity. Additionally, evidence-based practices are “supported by empirical research and professional wisdom so that research-based instructional methodologies could be implemented in the unique systems represented by each preK-12 public school” (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009, p. 3). Evidence-based strategies and instructional practices have been implemented in both special education and general education settings (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klinger, 2005) and have improved the learning of students with and without disabilities (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009). The use of evidence-based instructional strategies has informed classroom practice and has strengthened the understanding of effective practices for students with and without disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005).

Accordingly, special and general education teachers must have knowledge and experience in evidence-based instructional strategies to improve their teaching and improve student outcomes across content areas (Boardman et al. 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009; Pressley et al., 2001). Educators have had to rethink their roles as students are educated in increasingly inclusive settings (McLeskey et al., 2011) within the LRE to the greatest extent possible (*IDEA*, 2004). To ensure students receive specially-designed instruction as early intervention and as service delivery, there is

an emphasis on special education not being interpreted as “a place” but as a “set of services” to “focus more on student outcomes” (Prasse, 2006, p. 9).

To address revised and rigorous academic standards, teacher preparation programs may consider: (a) providing teachers with the knowledge necessary to be effective in their teaching practices (Boardman et al., 2005); (b) equipping teachers with the skills necessary to evaluate, select, and implement evidence-based instructional strategies aligned with student needs (Batsche, 2014; Cook & Cook, 2013; Little & Houston, 2003a); and (c) making data-driven instructional decisions (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007; Mandinach, 2012; Marsh & Farrell, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

As special education has evolved, the role of the special education teacher has expanded as schools adopt and implement policies and procedures aligned with federal legislation such as *IDEA*, *NCLB*, and most recently, *ESSA*. These mandates require educators within public schools to implement a tiered system of supports that provide evidence-based instruction and interventions for students in the LRE by qualified and knowledgeable teachers (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). Educators within districts and schools across the nation are implementing MTSS models, including collaborative teaching structures, in an effort to improve outcomes for students to meet the increasingly rigorous standards in the general education classroom (e.g., Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Providing early intervention for students requires collaboration between

special and general education teachers, and changes with instructional grouping practices (Fuchs et al., 2010; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012; Tremblay, 2013) to improve student outcomes.

Historically, collaboration between general and special education teachers was described as a shared responsibility (Will, 1986). To meet the needs of students with disabilities, special education has required collaboration between professionals (e.g., speech therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, social workers) (Friend et al., 2010; Little & Crawford, 2002; Knackendoffel, 2007). Collaboration could potentially provide professional support for teachers (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005) and differentiated instruction to students with disabilities affording them access the general education curriculum (Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). With implementation of current educational policies and practices (e.g., MTSS), collaboration may be enhanced and expanded to include the general education teacher to match their expertise in their content area with the special educators' knowledge of strategies and supports for students with disabilities (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Murawski and Hughes (2009) asserted that collaboration is “critical to the systemic change required for schools interested in supporting an [MTSS] model” (p. 267).

As schools adopt and implement the MTSS framework, the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher need to be considered, especially within increasingly inclusive settings. In an MTSS framework, students who require more intensive supports and instruction through intensive interventions should be provided with such supports at the earliest sign of struggling and before determination of eligibility for special education. Therefore, special education teachers must be prepared to provide specially-designed

services and individualized education instruction and support (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007) to students with and without disabilities. Collaboration supports differentiated instruction that enables all students to access the general education curriculum (Eisenman et al., 2011; Friend et al., 2010; Little & Crawford, 2002; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Murawski, 2006; Santamaria & Thousand, 2004; Todd, 2012).

However, the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS structure are dependent on those responsible for its implementation, as well as the existing demands and available resources (Thorius, Maxcy, Macey, & Cox, 2014). Implementation of education reforms such as MTSS is often conducted at the teacher level (Welner, 2001) and is shaped by the teachers, administrators, district policy, and local influences. The study of the implementation of education reforms is critical as it can impact the roles and responsibilities of those charged with its execution (e.g., special education teachers, general education teachers). There are multiple stages and levels at which policy can be shaped by unanticipated factors and local institutional effects (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009; Little, 2006). Policy changes practice and teachers are the agents of instructional policy (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016; Cohen, 1990). When inconsistent with their own agendas, teachers tend to either intentionally ignore or selectively follow policies (Spillane, 2004). Therefore, there is a critical need for research that explores the factors that affect the implementation of policy as practiced informing teacher learning and professional development.

Purpose of the Study

General education and special education teachers need the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to implement data-based decision-making, evidence-based instructional methods with fidelity, and provide differentiation of instruction to match student needs (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010; Castillo, March, Stockslager, & Hines, 2015; Swanson et al., 2012; Thorius et al., 2014). To this end, collaboration between general and special educators facilitates the match of the general education teacher's expertise in their content area with the special educator's knowledge of strategies and supports for at risk-students and students with disabilities (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). These changes suggest a "different, distinctive, and important role for special education" in the general education setting (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010, p. 301).

Fuchs and colleagues (2010) argued that there was a "blurring of special education in a new continuum of services" (p. 310) and this blurring requires the restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers who work in inclusive settings. Tremblay (2013) indicated that to effectively teach students with and without disabilities to reach rigorous academic standards and goals, the roles and responsibilities of the special and general education teachers would be restructured. This restructuring would require the unprecedented collaboration between special and general education teachers and a reexamination of their current roles and responsibilities (Fuchs et al., 2010) in the general education classroom. Swanson and colleagues (2012) asserted the implementation of MTSS in schools across the nation has a direct effect on the "roles and responsibilities of educators,

specifically, special education teachers, as schools shift the focus to prevention and early intervention for all students” (p. 115).

Research exists that explores the changing role of the special education teacher within inclusive classroom settings (e.g., Friend et al., 2010; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Pratt, 2014; Scruggs et al., 2007; Todd, 2012; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wang, Reynolds, & Wahlberg, 1986). However, research on the role of the special education teacher is considered within a collaborative focus. For students with disabilities to receive appropriate education within the least restrictive environment within the current educational context, there is a need to learn about the roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers directly responsible for student learning (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012) and concomitantly determine how these roles and responsibilities affect the delivery of specially-designed services to students with disabilities.

Identification of the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the educational framework will allow for the establishment of the fundamental knowledge, skills, and competencies required of special education teachers. Essentially, research needs to determine the answer to the following question: what do special education teachers need to know and what do they need to be able to do? The changing of the roles and responsibilities (Fuchs et al., 2010) of the special education teacher requires the field of special education to continually rethink and reconceptualize teacher roles to better organize teacher preparation (Brownell et al., 2010) as evidenced by changes in professional standards for special education teacher competencies (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children).

The change in the special education teacher's role has implications for teacher preparation at the preservice and professional development levels as the field continues to strive to improve academic outcomes for all students. Enhancement of knowledge base and performance skills through teacher preparation and continued learning opportunities are necessary especially when implementing new MTSS policies, practices, or procedures (Castillo et al., 2015; Hord & Roussin, 2013). Research will provide policy makers and practitioners additional clarity about the role of the special education teacher within inclusive settings.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study of the lived experiences of special education teachers explored two fundamental research questions: (a) What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who provide supports for students in inclusive settings in elementary schools?; and, (b) What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with providing supports in inclusive settings?

Design of the Study

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997) to answer the research questions. Merleau-Ponty (1956) described phenomenology as a “study of the essences” and “an attempt to define an essence, the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness” (p. 59). Phenomenology examines the phenomena as it currently exists which “precedes

reflection” as we are “already there” (Merleau-Ponty, 1956, p. 59). Therefore, this phenomenological study informed what knowledge and skills are required by special education teachers by analyzing their lived experiences. Further, this study interpreted the data which were “endemic to and definitive mark of human existence” (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 184) and allowed the researcher to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (van Manen, 1997, p. 36). In this phenomenological study, the researcher reported the data collected and made meaning of the data through interpretation and examination of the language used during interviews (Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

This study used a purposive, criterion sampling method and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007) to select special education teachers who worked in elementary schools in the southeast United States. Criterion sampling was used to select participants. To be included in this study, participants had to be representative of the phenomena to be studied (Creswell, 2013). Criteria met by special education teacher participants included: (a) certification in Exceptional Student Education; (b) current employee at a school site; (c) minimum of two years teaching; and (d) teaching responsibilities (including direct instruction and/or student support in the general education classroom). Participants had differing levels of participation in MTSS and these differences provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. Snowball sampling is a sampling procedure in which specific individuals are asked to recommend possible participants for the study (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; 2015)

Semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1980) were conducted with seven ($N = 7$) special education teachers. All interviews were video recorded with the permission of the

participants (Slavin, 2007). Interviews were conducted in public locations and were not conducted at any elementary school sites. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2013; Poland, 1995) using a transcription service. Member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003) was conducted using Creswell and Miller's (2000) "validity checking" procedure to gain final validation of the data for analysis and ensure the data collected represented the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Operational Definitions

Academic Support - Academic support refers to "a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services, or school resources provided to students in an effort to help them accelerate their learning process, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in school" (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, n.p.).

Alternate Assessments – according to the Southeastern state's Department of Education, an alternate assessment is "designed for students whose participation in the general statewide assessment program is not appropriate, even with accommodations" (FLDOE, 2016, n.p.).

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) – According to NCII (2016), AYP is an accountability measure that "requires each state to ensure that all schools and districts make annual growth in student proficiency, as defined by states and approved by the U.S. Department of Education" (n.p.).

Assessment – There are several forms of assessment (e.g., formal, informal); however, the term assessment refers to the methods or tools that "educators use to evaluate,

measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, n.p.).

At-Risk – Students who are considered at-risk have a greater probability of failing academically or dropping out of school before graduation (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).

Co-Teaching - Co-teaching is a method for providing special education services to students with disabilities in the general education classroom and has been defined as “an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings” (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989, p. 18).

Collaboration – The term collaboration refers to the process of bringing people or groups of people together for a common purpose through consultation and cooperation (Goulet, Krentz, & Christiansen, 2003).

Data-Based Decision-Making – The National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII; 2014) defined data-based decision-making as the “ongoing process of analyzing and evaluating student data to inform educational decisions, including but not limited to approaches to instruction, intervention, allocation of resources, development of policy, movement within a multi-level system, and disability identification” (n.p.).

Data-Based Individualization (DBI) – Individualizing instruction based on data and through data-based decision-making. Through continued and constant progress monitoring and the analyses of data collected professionals can revise instruction and intervention to meet the educational needs of the student (NCII, 2016).

Differentiation - Differentiated instruction is a proactive approach to improving classroom learning for all students (Pettig, 2000) and includes on-going assessment and adjustment, clarity of the standards and learning goals of the curriculum, use of flexible grouping, tasks that are respectful of each learner, and instruction that stretches the learner (Tomlinson, 2003).

Discrepancy Model – To determine eligibility for special education services, Public Law 94-142 established a need to illustrate a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic performance of students (Fuchs et al., 2008).

Evidence-Based Practices - Evidence-based instructional practices, termed scientifically-based practices in *NCLB* legislation, were defined as “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (Title IX, Part A, SEC 9101[37], *NCLB*). Evidence-based instructional practices are further described as instructional techniques that meet a rigorous, prescribed set of research criteria and have been shown to have a statistically significant impact on student achievement when implemented with fidelity (Cook & Cook, 2013).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – Refers to special education and related services that are provided at the public’s expense without charge and meet the standards of the State educational agency and are provided in accordance with the Individualized Education Plan (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(9), *IDEA*).

High-Stakes Testing – A high-stakes test “is any test used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly for the purpose of

accountability” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, n.p). Furthermore, results of high-stakes testing “are used to determine punishments (such as sanctions, penalties, funding reductions, negative publicity), accolades (awards, public celebration, positive publicity), advancement (grade promotion or graduation for students), or compensation (salary increases or bonuses for administrators and teachers)” (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, n.p).

Highly-Qualified – The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* of 2004 (*IDEA*, 2004) requires that all public elementary and secondary special education teachers be considered “highly-qualified”. The definition of “highly-qualified” in *IDEA* (2004) is directly aligned with *No Child Left Behind's* (*NCLB*, 2001) “highly-qualified” requirements. The requirements in *NCLB* stipulates that to be considered highly-qualified, teachers must hold at least a Bachelor’s Degree, have full state certification or licensure, and must prove that they are knowledgeable in the subject area(s) they teach. According to *NCLB*, special education teachers

“who do not directly instruct students in core academic subjects or who provide only consultation to highly-qualified teachers in adapting curricula, using behavioral supports and interventions or selecting appropriate accommodations, do not need to demonstrate subject-matter competency in those subjects” (USDOE, 2004).

Further, *IDEA* includes each of these provisions and adds, “the teacher has obtained full State certification as a special education teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification), or passed the State special education teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in the State as a special education teacher (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(10)B(i), *IDEA*).

Inclusion – According to NCII (2016), “Inclusion is a service delivery model in which students with identified disabilities are educated in the general education setting with their age-group or grade-level peers” (n.p.).

Individualized Education Plan – *IDEA* defines an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as a “written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with section 614(d)” (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(14) *IDEA*).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – LRE refers to the extent to which students with disabilities are educated alongside their non-disabled peers in the general education classroom (NCII, 2016).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) – *ESSA* legislation defined MTSS as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decisionmaking (sic)” (Section 8002(10)(33)).

Problem-Solving Approach – A problem-solving approach allows teachers to create an intervention plan responsive to the needs of an individual student. There are four stages to the problem-solving approach: (a) identification of the problem, (b) analysis of the problem, (c) implementation of the plan to address the problem, and (d) evaluation of the plan (NCII, 2016).

Progress Monitoring – Professionals or teams of professionals monitor the progress of a student and quantify their rate of improvement after implementing instruction and intervention to inform further instructional needs (NCII, 2016).

Reciprocity – In a qualitative study, reciprocity has been defined as “the give and take of social interactions” (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 323). Reciprocity is a requisite for gaining in-depth interviews. Building trust with participants provides them with a voice and empower them through the research (Harrison et al., 2001).

Reflexivity – In a qualitative study, reflexivity considers the effect of the researcher on the research process and requires the researcher to constantly attend to his or her bias in the construction of knowledge of the phenomenon. Reflexivity “emphasizes an awareness of the researcher’s own presence in the research process” (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley & Stevenson, 1999). Further, according to Barry and colleagues (1999), the researcher essentially “construct[s] that which we claim to ‘find’” (p. 30).

Response to Intervention (RtI) – RtI was the initial phrase used in *IDEA* (1997, 2004) legislation to describe a multi-tiered system of supports. RtI was defined as a multi-tiered system of supports that for prevention and intervention to maximize student achievement (National Center on Response to Intervention [NCRTI], 2012). RtI allows schools to

“identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities” (NCRTI, 2012, n.p.).

Later use was described in *ESSA* (2015) legislation to include a framework “that organizes building-level resources to address each individual student’s academic and/or behavioral

needs within intervention tiers that vary in intensity” (NCRTI, 2013, n.p.). According to the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII, 2016), RtI is an example of MTSS.

Scientifically-Based Instruction – *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2001) legislation defined scientifically-based research as:

“research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and includes research that employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn; relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators; is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across condition controls; ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review” (SEC 1411(e)(2)(C)(xi); *NCLB*).

Service Delivery - Service delivery refers to the special education services provided to students with disabilities. In an inclusive setting, service delivery can be provided in a separate classroom, a resource room, or within the general education classroom and is dependent on the school and teachers' evaluation of student need (Sindelar, Wasburn-Moses, Thomas, & Leko, 2014). Further, service delivery can vary in its implementation drawing distinctions between services provided to students with disabilities through co-teaching, pull-out (e.g., resource room), and self-contained classrooms.

Special Education Services – *IDEA* defines special education services as a means for providing “specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(29) *IDEA*).

Special Education Teacher – According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2016), a special education teacher is a teacher who works with students with disabilities and may work in either an inclusive or resource setting, or both depending on student need. Special education teachers who work in an inclusive setting may co-teach or assist a general education teacher to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Special education teachers may provide supports to students in a resource setting. In this setting, the special education teacher pulls students out of the general classroom to teach them in a smaller setting.

Specially-Designed Instruction – A term that refers to the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction. Further, *IDEA* requires that Specially-Designed Instruction address the unique needs of the students, provide the student with a way to access the general

education curriculum, and be implemented in accordance with the students' IEP (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(29)(A) *IDEA*).

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) – According to *IDEA*, SLD refers to a disability in which one or more of the “basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(30)(A) *IDEA*). Further, this classification includes “conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia” (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(30)(B) *IDEA*). This classification does not include “a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (SEC 602 <<20 U.S.C. 1401>>(30)(C) *IDEA*).

Validity Check – A validity check is a process in which the participant is provided with the opportunity to review the verbatim transcription of their interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The “validity check” process allows the participant to: (a) determine if the transcription captured their experience accurately, and (b) provide clarifications or additional information if necessary.

Varying Exceptionalities (VE) – In the state in which this study takes place, the term Varying Exceptionalities (VE) refers to a composition of students with varying disabilities who are taught in a self-contained classroom. Copans-Astrand (2000) offered the following IDEA disability categories are specifically included: Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Intellectual Disabilities (InD), speech and language impairments, and Other Health

Impairments (OHI). However, there does not appear to be a clearly accepted definition of VE. Therefore, the researcher in this study proposes VE be defined a composition of students with varying disabilities including any of the 13 disability categories as defined by IDEA (2004).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is organized in three sections that provide the historical and current context of access and equity of education and service delivery for students who are at-risk and students with disabilities educated in public schools within the U.S. The first section provides a brief overview of the history of special education and its impact on service delivery to students with disabilities, including access to the general education curriculum through specially-designed instructional practices. Further, a brief overview of federal legislation is provided. Since 1975, federal legislation has been instrumental in shaping policies and procedures that would later lead to the use of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to support at-risk students and students with disabilities achieve rigorous, grade level standards. Federal legislation has led to changes in special education teacher qualifications and requirements which have ultimately affected teacher preparation, including roles and responsibilities. The second section describes the purpose, structure, and procedures of MTSS, as well as its use as a system to support inclusion, administer interventions for students at-risk, and provide service delivery for students with disabilities who have persistent educational needs. This section also explains the policies and procedures for implementation of MTSS as it exists in the Southeastern state where this study occurred. Finally, a review of literature describes the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers within the changing educational contexts of inclusion, collaboration, and rigorous academic standards.

Access and Equity in Education

The history of special education has been shaped by advocacy, research, litigation, and legislation. Early advocacy efforts by committed and determined parents, teachers, and educators focused on access and equity of educational opportunity for students with disabilities who were initially segregated from society (Yell et al., 1998). Advocacy and litigation led to federal and state legislation mandating provisions for special education services for millions of students with disabilities educated in the public school system. Legislation framed educational reforms and sweeping changes to ensure students with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) (*PL 94-142*, 1975; Ikeda, 2012) in the LRE (Eisenman et al., 2011; Zigmond et al., 2009) by qualified educators who have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement evidence-based instructional practices (Little & Houston, 2003a).

Litigation to Support Special Education

In the 1900s, students with disabilities were excluded from or received unequal treatment within the public school system (Yell et al., 1998). Court decisions provided initial access to the free and appropriate educational services for students with disabilities that were afforded to their non-disabled peers (Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley, 2011). During this time, public education was not a right extended to students with disabilities and was considered a privilege (Best, 1930).

The practice of exclusion continued well into the mid-1900s despite growing evidence to support the claim that children with disabilities could benefit from instruction

(e.g., Best, 1930; Magnifico, 1958). When education was available to children with disabilities, it was practical in nature and often in an ungraded school (Macy, 1910). Such placement meant that students with disabilities did not have access to the general education curriculum and were segregated from typically-developing children. However, by the 1950s, the increasing number of students requiring special education services garnered the attention of advocacy organizations (e.g., American Association of Instructors for the Blind, Council for Exceptional Children, National Association for Retarded Citizens, and Association for Children with Learning Disabilities) and by parents who battled for federal legislation to protect the right to a public education for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998; Yell et al., 2011).

Those opposed to providing a public education to students with disabilities believed educating students with disabilities would require differentiated instruction, specialized curriculum, access to a specially-trained teacher, and the adaptation of existing facilities to meet their specific needs (Stevens & Stevens, 1948). Some concluded these requirements would be too taxing and burdensome on schools (Stevens & Stevens, 1948). At the time, opponents argued that despite the trend to enact policies that required children with disabilities to be educated within the public schools, there was a lack of processes for identifying and classifying children (Smith, 1957), lack of standardized special education terminology (Kirk & Kolstoe, 1953), and a lack of general agreement on the characteristics of students with disabilities, which made it difficult for educators to provide effective instruction, intervention, and supports.

Opponents to the inclusion of students with disabilities in public education argued that research was critical, given concerns that school districts would become “burdened” with the provision of special education classes (Smith, 1957, p. 377). Districts backed opponents and supported the need for research to demonstrate that providing a public education to students with disabilities was not necessary and would serve little purpose. In stark contrast, advocates for the education of students with disabilities supported research as a means to provide access to educational opportunity for those with disabilities not as a means for denying their right to public education. Advocates argued that while special education was costly, it was a fundamental right because students with disabilities have educational “needs that characterize all human beings” (Boykin, 1957, p.47).

The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s provided additional momentum to the growing movement to provide access to a public education to children with disabilities (Slanda & Little, In Press; Yell et al., 1998). Court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) set precedence for advocates who claimed denying educational access to students with disabilities was the equivalent of denying equal educational opportunities based on race (Yell et al., 2001). Although it took time to realize the effects of the *Brown* case on special education, the case was influential in its ability to lead to changes in school policies and practices for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998).

Building on the precedence set in *Brown*, several landmark court cases resulted in the requirement to provide educational services to students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). Among these cases, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v.*

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) were the most notable. In both of these cases, it was determined students with disabilities were denied an education when they were excluded from school without due process of the law as guaranteed by the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The result of these cases was requirement that school districts provide students with a public education. Further, *Mills* (1972) outlined procedures for the identification and placement of students with disabilities.

Specifically, the justices in *Mills* court decision (1972) opined that the Board of Education must “set forth a comprehensive plan for the education, treatment and care of physically or mentally impaired children in the age range from three to twenty-one years”, and “establish procedures to implement the finding that all children can benefit from education and, have a right to it, by providing comprehensive health and psychological appraisal of children and provision of special education which he may need” (*Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 348 F. Supp. 866). The *Mills* case concluded that “all children regardless of any handicap or other disability have a right to publicly-supported education suited to their needs” (p. 145). In response, public schools were required to create, adopt, and enact procedures and policies for students with disabilities that “assure the maximum coordination of educational and other municipal programs and service in achieving the most effective educational system” (p. 23). As a result of this case, the Board of Education was required to: (a) develop procedures for identifying children with disabilities; (b) provide educational access through specially-designed instruction; (c) include parents in the educational process; and (d) provide due process (Slanda & Little, In Press).

Federal Legislation

Beginning in 1975, federal legislation guaranteed a public education to students with disabilities through special education. *Public Law 94-142*, also known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975)*, has been reauthorized multiple times since its initial passage to address issues that persisted over time, in an effort to remain current with research, and to respond to critical issues within special education. Each revision has added provisions to address issues stemming from policy implementation or growing trends in the field. Provisions within this law have further clarified and defined terms, outlined processes and procedures, and included guidelines for the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. Each reauthorization responds to issues and needs of students at the time and resulted in implications for provision of services and special education teacher preparation. The roles and responsibilities of special educators has evolved with each reauthorization as teachers must be prepared with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to effectively teach students with disabilities.

Public Law 94-142

In 1975, *Public Law 94-142 (EAHCA)* was passed and it “set forth an educational bill of rights for students with disabilities” (Yell & Drasgow, 2007, p. 202). Six main provisions within this legislation continue to frame the educational guarantees for students with disabilities (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). These provisions guarantee the rights to: (a) free and appropriate education (FAPE), including related services (e.g., occupational therapy, speech/language therapy) regardless of the disability category; (b) education in the LRE as

determined by individual student needs within a continuum of placements; (c) an appropriate education through an individualized education plan (IEP) which addresses specific criteria including the student's present level of performance, annual goals, and service delivery modes and lengths; (d) procedural due process; (e) non-discriminatory assessment; and (f) parental participation that is meaningful and inclusive of the parent in the decision-making process. Interpretations of these provisions have been clarified through court cases, research, and policies which have modified and expanded interpretations of this original legislation; however, these six provisions remain at the foundation of each reauthorization.

Students with disabilities were guaranteed access to a free and appropriate education based upon individual educational programs (*PL 94-142*, 1975). In addition, this legislation included the responsibility of finding, evaluating, and identifying students with disabilities to ensure eligible students were provided with appropriate educational services for an identified disability as determined. The disability categories were defined in the legislation and included deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. Autism was added in a later revision of the legislation. To be eligible for special education services, it must be determined that a student meets the eligibility requirements for a disability as defined by one the categories **and** their disability adversely affects academic performance (Daly et al., 2007). Therefore, it must be demonstrated that a student's educational needs cannot be addressed through evidence-based instructional

strategies in the general education classroom and requires specially-designed instruction guaranteed by an individualized education program (IEP; *IDEA*, 2004).

Regardless of disability category, access to public education was afforded to all students as schools were required to meet the varied educational needs of students by providing specially-designed instruction (Keogh, 2007). In 1962, Reynolds created a conceptual framework for special education services that outlined a continuum of services based on student needs for specially-designed instruction from the most to least restrictive environment. This became known as a “cascade system of special education services” (Deno, 1970, p. 235) and provided a framework for states and school districts to make appropriate placement decisions to meet individual needs of students with disabilities (Deno & Mirkin, 1977). Special education services were provided both inside and outside of the general education classroom, determined by disability category and multi-disciplinary teams (Ikeda, 2012), and based on behavioral approaches (Brownell et al., 2010; Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016). Special education service delivery under *PL 94-142* was driven by individual student needs and provided specially-designed instruction to be consistent with the requirements of the law (e.g., Germann, 2010; Ikeda, 2012). Further, *PL 94-142* provided funding to states and research centers for research and development of instructional approaches that special education teachers needed to effectively teach students with disabilities for access to a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities (Ikeda, 2012).

As a result, *PL 94-142* had a direct impact on teacher education programs at colleges and universities to prepare teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively

teach diverse students with disabilities (Keogh, 2007), many of whom had not been receiving education within public schools. Colleges and universities were also charged with the task of advancing research in best practices for educating students with disabilities (Keogh, 2007). To effectively teach diverse students with disabilities, teachers needed to be versed in eligibility, identification, and placement of students with disabilities. Teacher education programs prepared special education teachers with skills to provide a diagnostic and prescriptive approach to educating students with a focus on the category of disability (e.g., mild, severe, profound) (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

As *PL 94-142* was implemented, it was realized that the principles for LRE and FAPE needed to be clarified and expanded (Gamson, McDermott, & Reed, 2015). In 1990, the law was revised and reauthorized as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*; Yell et al., 2011). Major changes in *IDEA* included: (a) person-first language; (b) replacing the term, “handicapped” with the term, “student with a disability”; (c) adding “autism” as a separate category; and (d) addition of transition plans to student’s IEPs by age 16 (Yell et al., 2011). These revisions not only impacted the rights and education of students with disabilities, but also, impacted teacher preparation to assure appropriate education. *IDEA* was divided into five main provisions, Parts A, B, C, D, and E.

Table 1 outlines the provisions.

Table 1:

Provisions of *IDEA* (Reprinted from Slanda and Little, In Press).

Part	Provision Description
Part A	Justified the need for the legislation Provided general provision of the Act Defined terms specific to special education
Part B	Included provisions of special education for students aged 3-21 Designed to improve access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. <u>Guided by six main principles (Anastasiow, Gallagher, & Kirk, 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000)</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. States must provide all children, regardless of their disability with a <i>FAPE</i> and no student can be excluded from public education; 2. <i>Identification and evaluation</i> is to be conducted by a team of qualified personnel and must be unbiased and culturally responsive; 3. Eligible students must be provided with a <i>uniquely designed education</i> that addresses their specific needs and be outlined in an Individualized Education Program (IEP); 4. Eligible students must be educated in the <i>Least Restrictive Environment</i> (LRE) “to the maximum extent appropriate” and are “to be educated with children who are not disabled” (<i>IDEA</i>, 2004, PL 108-446, Section 300.114(a)(2)); 5. Parents and families have the right to exercise their <i>due process</i> rights as promised under the 14th Amendment and have the right to attain an independent evaluation, request a hearing, appeal, and keep records confidential; and, 6. Requires <i>parental participation</i>, a key part of the special education process from identification to evaluation and placement.
Part C	Stipulated provisions and funding for the identification and early intervention services for infants and toddlers from birth to age two.
Part D	Included provisions for the programs and services aimed to improve the education of students with disabilities including parent services, technical assistance, professional development, and technology.
Part E	Created The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER), a center dedicated to conducting research to advance the education of students with disabilities.

By 1997, reauthorization of *IDEA* “changed the focus of the law from providing *access* to service to improving *results* and accountability” (Bradley & Danielson, 2004, p. 187). *IDEA* added provisions requiring students with disabilities: have access to the general education curriculum (West & Whitby, 2008); participate in state and district assessments; and, be included in mandatory reporting of their performance on those assessments and in federal and state accountability systems (Gable & Hendrickson, 2004). Changes to the IEP as a result of this reauthorization included: the addition of measureable annual goals; an explanation of how progress towards those goals would be measured; informing parents about the student’s progress toward their annual goals; and, revision of the IEP if a student failed to meet the stated goals (Yell et al., 2011). Additionally, *IDEA* addressed discipline and provided guidelines regarding the approach to discipline for students with disabilities, IEP requirements for behavior interventions, and guidance on approaches to serious problem behaviors (Yell et al., 2011). Although inclusion was not mandated nor described in the legislation, the LRE provision was interpreted at the discretion of a team of professionals and ranged anywhere from students receiving special education services in segregated settings to including them in the general education classroom depending on student needs as outlined in their IEPs. As a result, the number of students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom (more than 80% of their school day) increased from 33% in the 1990-1991 school year to 61% by the 2012-2013 school year (NCES, 2015).

IDEA emphasized “that special education can become a service...rather than a place where such children are sent” (SEC 601(C)5(C), *IDEA*). This emphasis allowed educators to address the educational needs of students through a problem-solving approach before

receiving a referral to special education (Prasse, 2006). Schools were incentivized by *IDEA* beginning in 1997 to implement “pre-referral interventions” which were meant “to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address their learning needs” (Section 601(C)(5)(F), *IDEA*). Research has supported early intervention and identification to reduce the achievement gap between students with academic (e.g., literacy) difficulties and their peers (Blachman, Tangel, Ball, Black, & McGraw, 1999). Early and immediate interventions were specifically designed to meet the varied needs of individual students (Lose, 2007). Research described academic benefits to students who received intervention at the first sign of difficulty (Lose, 2007; Lose et al., 2007; O’Connor et al., 2013; Reynolds et al., 2007; Schwartz et al., 2012; Vellutino et al., 1996; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009).

Initial legislation (*PL 94-142*) required a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic performance to determine eligibility for special education services for several categories (e.g., specific learning disabilities) (Fuchs et al., 2008). Although federal legislation required the documentation of a discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic performance, federal legislation did not operationally define eligibility criteria (Bradley et al., 2005), leaving its interpretation to the states and school districts. The lack of accepted definitions and eligibility criteria resulted in students being unidentified or misidentified (Bradley et al., 2005; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). The discrepancy model left students “unidentified and often floundering academically well into the upper grades of elementary school until the discrepancy becomes significant enough to warrant services” (Bradley et al., 2005, p. 485).

There was a growing concern that the IQ/achievement discrepancy model was “neither necessary nor sufficient” in identifying students with specific learning disabilities (Bradley et al., 2005). Limitations of the discrepancy model included: (a) students remaining unidentified until upper elementary grade levels, (b) a widening of the achievement gap since students were left to struggle until the discrepancy was significant, (c) providing limited information about a student’s academic need, (d) lack of a plan for addressing the academic discrepancies (i.e., remediation), (e) misdiagnosis, and (f) over-identification of learning disabilities (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009; Bradley et al., 2007). In addition, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) argued that there were several unintended consequences of the discrepancy model which negatively impacted students. These concerns prompted the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) to write a letter to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) which later became known as the Learning Disabilities (LD) Initiative (Bradley et al., 2007). The discrepancy model, later referred to as the *wait-to-fail* approach (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), prompted reauthorizations of the *IDEA* legislation which emphasized early and accurate identification of students with disabilities. In this way, the LD Initiative gave way to a Response to Intervention (RtI) model that researchers believed would address the limitations.

When *IDEA* was reauthorized in 2004 (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEIA*), states were able to replace the discrepancy model with the problem-solving approach, originally known as Response to Intervention (RtI), as a method for identification of learning disabilities (Bradley et al., 2007). RtI had the potential “to reduce the prevalence of academic difficulty while enhancing the validity with which

learning disabilities (LD) are identified” (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012, p. 195). The RtI framework resulted from literature on early screening, progress monitoring for learning gains, and the positive effects of small group interventions and tutoring (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012). These components are central to the RtI process. RtI, now also referred to as Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS), was a prevention model designed to provide services and supports to students at the earliest sign of struggling. Through continued progress monitoring, MTSS is an educational framework designed to encourage teachers to provide students with individualized instruction and intensive interventions, as needed. Within the MTSS framework, educators should evaluate and assess students’ response to high-quality, evidence-based interventions through flexible service delivery within the general education classroom aligned with eligibility processes

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004)* expanded equity and access to services for students with disabilities by addressing persistent issues. Under the 2004 reauthorization, IEPs were required to include “a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary` aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable” (Yell et al., 2011, p. 64). Additionally, with respect to eligibility, a student could not be eligible for special education services if the student was not taught with scientifically-based instruction. Early intervention services were a focus of the 2004 reauthorization as special education funds could be allocated for services to students who were at-risk in the general education classroom. School districts were permitted to use up to 15% of their *IDEA* Part B funds to provide pre-referral and early intervention services (SEC 613(a)(2)(C) *IDEIA*).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004) recognized that the “federal government must be responsive to the growing needs of an increasingly diverse society” (Section 601(C)(10)(A), *IDEIA*). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; 2004)* cited studies that “have documented apparent discrepancies in the levels of referral and placement of limited English proficient children in special education” (Section 601(C)(11)(B), *IDEIA*) and that “more minority children continue to be served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of minority children in the general school population” (Section 601(C)(12)(B), *IDEIA*). Under *IDEIA*, it was asserted that a problem-solving RtI model would address these discrepancies as the focus would shift from perceived student deficiencies to the instruction provided to students to enable them to access the general education curriculum. Table 2 provides a comparison of RtI and the discrepancy model.

Table 2:

Venn Diagram of RtI and the Discrepancy Model (FLDOE, 2006).

RtI Model	Shared Characteristics	Discrepancy Model
Early Intervention	Protections and Provisions Within <i>IDEA</i>	Discrepancy Formula Based on Difference Between Ability and Achievement
Data-Based Decision-Making	Multidisciplinary Teams Gather Data and Share in The Decision-Making	Limited Assessment in Limited Settings
Progress Monitoring		
Solution Driven		Problem-within-Child Focus on Problem Solving
Multi-Tiered Intervention Model		Focus on Variables That Cannot Be Altered
Service Delivery		Focus on Labels and Test Scores
Collaborative		
Focus on Variables that Can be Altered		Clear Eligibility Criteria

The increased policy focus on intervention, individualized instruction (e.g., IEPs), and specially-designed instruction to meet students’ unique needs, skills and knowledge needed by special education teachers became more comprehensive and dynamic. Specially-designed instruction (*IDEIA*, 2004) “may include supports, such as assistive technology; expanded opportunities to practice and master concepts; evidence-based practices (EBP) such as time delay or response chaining; as well as frequent monitoring of the child’s progress” (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 86). Implementing specially-designed instruction effectively expands the necessary knowledge of teachers to previously required skills such eligibility procedures, collaboration, transition, and development of IEPs (Dukes, Darling, & Doan,

2014; Leko & Smith, 2010; Shepherd et al., 2016). Special education teachers needed to be prepared to manage caseloads of students, collaborate and share responsibility with general education teachers, and provide a continuum of services in the LRE (Shepherd et al., 2016). Special education teacher preparation programs under *IDEIA* needed research-based pedagogy to prepare special educators to assist students to access the general education curriculum (Kleinhammer-Tramill, Mickelson, & Barton, 2014).

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* was reauthorized and became known as *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*. This reauthorization included provisions for increased accountability, inclusion of students with disabilities in state-mandated assessments, and the use of scientifically-based instructional and behavioral practices and strategies. The reauthorization of the *ESEA* in 2001 extended far beyond the general education classroom. *NCLB* placed greater emphasis on school accountability (Desimone, 2013) as measured through high-stakes testing. In compliance with annual yearly progress (AYP) policy mandates as set forth within the *NCLB* legislation, school assessment data must be disaggregated by subpopulations (e.g., students with disabilities, ethnicity) and must report each subpopulations' progress in the general education curriculum (Slanda & Little, In Press). *NCLB* further emphasized the use of scientifically-based instructional methods during classroom instruction. Scientifically-based instructional methods were defined as “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid

knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (Title IX, Part A, SEC 9101[37] *NCLB*).

Additionally, access and equity to general education curriculum was affirmed through the *NCLB* requirement for all core content area courses (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, and reading) to be taught by highly-qualified teachers. To be considered “highly-qualified”, teachers had to meet state-developed criteria that included education and certification requirements. This had several implications for the special education teacher who had historically not been content area certified (Sayeski & Higgins, 2014). The highly-qualified requirement in *NCLB* meant that special education teachers “need to possess knowledge not only of students with disabilities and effective strategies for instruction, but also of the academic content delivered in the general curriculum” (Sayeski & Higgins, 2014, p. 92). To effectively provide access to grade level content, special education teachers who provided direct instruction in content areas needed have knowledge of that academic content and standards associated with that content. Special education teachers could demonstrate their subject knowledge competency by meeting state licensure requirements (Geiger et al., 2014). However, special educators who work in a consultative or inclusive service delivery role (e.g., co-teaching) often did not need to demonstrate competency in the subject area within which they worked (Geiger et al., 2014). Further, teachers were held accountable for student achievement of academic standards by revisions to teacher evaluation systems. Although research has continually affirmed the significance of teacher quality and its impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011), this legislation (*NCLB*,

2001) directly connected teacher evaluation with student achievement, often as measured on high-stakes state assessments.

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, *ESEA* was once again reauthorized and entitled the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. This latest reauthorization reversed some of the principles of *NCLB*. *ESSA* was a largely bipartisan, bicameral legislation, which offered “a stronger path forward for children and youth with exceptionalities than the outdated *No Child Left Behind Act*” (CEC Policy Insider, 2015, p. 30). In this latest reauthorization, the federal government ceded some control to the states, districts, and schools and granted considerable leeway in several educational areas (CEC, 2015). Under *ESSA*, states garnered greater flexibility and choice in: (a) the adoption of rigorous standards aligned with college and career goals; (b) the design and employment of state mandated assessments to measure accountability; and (c) in the application and implementation of instruction and intervention using a multi-tier system of supports (*ESSA*, 2015).

ESSA reiterated the need for increased rigor in curriculum through the adoption of academic standards aligned with college and career goals. Under *ESSA*, states were granted the autonomy to determine appropriate academic standards for their students. Although states determined and implemented their own achievement standards, *ESSA* required states to “demonstrate that they have ‘challenging academic standards’ aligned with ‘entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the [state’s] system of public higher education’ and with ‘state career and technical education standards’” (Weiss & McGuinn,

2016, p. 30). Regardless of student need, all students, including students with disabilities, must work towards mastering the same general education curriculum standards (*ESSA*, 2015). Under this new legislation, only students with the most severe cognitive disabilities can work towards mastery of alternate academic achievement standards and assessments as “the total number of students assessed in such subject using the alternate assessments does not exceed one percent of the total number of all students in the State who are assessed in such subject” (Section 1111(b)(2)(D)(i)(I), *ESSA*). This is especially critical as all students, including those with disabilities, must be prepared for a dynamic workforce with different skills and knowledge than previously required (Shoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Therefore, *ESSA* renewed the emphasis on strengthening standards and rigor for all students, the use of evidence-based practices to support student learning, and the use of data-based instructional decision-making using a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS). *ESSA* defined MTSS as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decisionmaking (sic)”. Specifically, *ESSA* recognized that to “increase the ability of teachers to effectively teach children with disabilities, including children with significant cognitive disabilities, and English learners” the use of “multi-tier systems of support and positive behavioral intervention and supports” was necessary to help students “meet the challenging State academic standards” (Section 2103(b)(3)(F), *ESSA*).

Accountability structures to measure learning for all students, including those with disabilities, were left to the discretion of each individual state. However, *ESSA* mandated that accountability goals adopted by each state address student proficiency on state

assessments, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates. Accountability goals must include an expectation for both achievement and graduation for all AYP groups to close achievement gaps, especially for the most historically marginalized groups. To close the gap between AYP groups, research-based instruction and target setting were to be delineated in school improvement plans for students and for educators responsible for student learning (Franquiz & Ortiz, 2016).

Teacher quality and preparation remained a priority in *ESSA*. Although the new legislation removed the highly-qualified requirement (Shepherd et al., 2016) and eliminated the use of a federally-mandated teacher evaluation previously supported in *NCLB* legislation (CEC, 2015), *ESSA* emphasized the need for orchestrated recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified teachers, principals, and other school personnel. Defining and measuring teacher effectiveness has been returned to the states (Shepherd et al., 2016). Teacher preparation programs and professional development must be considered high-quality and evidence-based. However, alternate certification programs are acceptable as special education teachers are permitted to hold a Bachelor's degree in a non-education field (*ESSA*, 2015). Although Title II is not new, *ESSA* provided funding for induction programs to prepare new teachers and principals, as well as stipulations for unlimited funds for professional development under Title II (CEC, 2015).

Table 3 provides a synopsis of what was rejected and preserved from *NCLB*, and what has been adopted under *ESSA*.

Table 3:

Shifts from *NCLB* to *ESSA*. Adapted from CEC's Summary of Selected Provisions in *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*; Reprinted from Slanda & Little, In Press).

Rejected	Preserved	Adopted
<p>School Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vouchers • Portability provisions that would have allowed states to shift federal funds away from high-need schools <p>Teacher Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly-qualified teacher requirement • Federally mandated teacher effectiveness evaluation model 	<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual, statewide assessments in reading and math for grades 3-8, and once in high school • Annual, statewide assessments in Science to occur a minimum of three times between grades 3-12 • Provisions for 1% of the students with most significant cognitive disabilities to take an alternate academic achievement assessment <p>Reporting Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual reporting of disaggregated data of subgroups of children, including those with disabilities <p>Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures access to the general education curriculum • Ensures access to accommodations for assessments <p>School Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School choice through Charter School expansion 	<p>Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability, educator evaluations, and school improvement shifts from federal government to state and local districts • A singular, high-stakes test is replaced with multiple measures of school and student performance • Elimination of assessments that do not contribute to student learning <p>Reporting Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is replaced with statewide accountability system <p>Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic standards aligned with higher education requirements are to be chosen by the states • MTSS to help struggling learners meet challenging academic standards • Principles of Universal Design for Learning • Preschool Development Grant Program <p>Teacher Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and principal residency and induction programs, continued and unlimited professional development funds, growth systems and leadership opportunities • Funds for establishing or advancing teacher preparation academies

Edyburn (2014) asserted that with this legislation “the future of special education is largely no longer under the sole control of the profession, but rather is embodied in the larger context of general education reform efforts” (p. 454). The *ESSA* legislation included implications for both general education and special education in unprecedented ways. The legislation further blurred the lines between two bodies of legislation (e.g., general education legislation of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and special education under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*) that had historically operated independent of each other. The *ESSA* legislation sought to provide access and equity of educational opportunities to all students “regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live” and that every child “deserves the chance to make of their lives what they will” (Obama, 2015, para. 18).

Federal Legislation and Teacher Preparation

Special education teacher preparation has progressed from providing the knowledge, skills, and competencies for teachers working in specialized, self-contained settings (Brownell et al., 2010) to including skills necessary to effectively collaborate and teach in inclusive classrooms (Fuchs et al., 2010). Teacher preparation programs for special educators prior to *IDEA* emphasized knowledge and skills that were associated with the category of disability, were more clinical in nature, and often based on behavioral approaches to instruction (Shepherd et al., 2016). However, continued reauthorizations of federal legislation (e.g., *IDEIA*, *NCLB*, *ESSA*) have influenced and changed the roles and responsibilities of special educators. In response to federal legislation, special education has:

(a) moved from providing services in a self-contained setting to the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible; (b) emphasized increased collaboration with service delivery approaches being provided in the LRE (Shepherd et al., 2016); (c) increased the knowledge base from strategies for instruction to include content area proficiency; and (d) required an outcomes-based approach to instruction delivered using evidence-based practices. Further, service delivery for students within the MTSS structure requires co-teaching and collaboration, with a focus on differentiation of instruction within the general education classroom.

With each reauthorization of legislation, major tenets were built upon and expanded. There were many changes with each re-authorization to address issues that persisted despite earlier reauthorizations or expand on areas of need. Additionally, the requirements for special education teachers were expanded to include increased knowledge and skills required to reflect the additions in legislation. The changes included in Table 4 highlight the revisions in student services and teacher education, therefore not every revision is included in this table. Table 4 begins with *PL 94-142* in 1975 to the current context under *ESSA* passed in 2015.

Table 4:

Federal Legislation and Changes in Teacher Preparation Requirements

PL 94-142	IDEA	NCLB	IDEIA	ESSA
Major Tenets of Legislation				
Free and Appropriate Public Education	Person first language	Accountability	Response to Intervention	Use of Multi-Tier System of Supports
Least Restrictive Environment	Replaced IQ-Achievement discrepancy requirement	Annual Yearly Progress	Accountability Measures	Access to general education curriculum to all students
Appropriate, unique education based on Individual Education Plan	Guidelines for early identification, evaluation, and placement	High-stakes Testing	Early Intervention and pre-referral services	Inclusion of 99% of all students in school assessment measures
Procedural Due Process	Transition	Scientifically-based instruction	Scientifically-based instruction	
Non-Discriminatory Assessment	Autism added as separate category		Flexible service delivery in the general education classroom	
Parental Participation			Changes to IEP to include measurable annual goals	
Impact of Legislation on Teacher Education and Special Education Teachers' Knowledge and Skills				
Ability to provide specially-designed instruction	Ability to properly assess students and make eligibility decisions	Highly-qualified	Highly-qualified	Highly-qualified provision repealed
Knowledge of continuum of service delivery	Knowledge of transition services and development of IEPs	Value-Added Models and teacher evaluation systems aimed to improve teacher knowledge and skills	Specially-designed instruction & scientifically-based practices	Teacher and principal residency and induction programs, continued and unlimited professional development funds, growth systems and leadership opportunities
Eligibility Requirements	Knowledge of and ability to use evidence-based practices, progress monitoring, and data-based instructional decision-making	Content knowledge requirements	Assistive technology	
Prescriptive and diagnostic knowledge base		Bachelor's Degree	Progress monitoring	
Behavior approach to instructional strategies	Providing supports in the general education classroom	Collaborative approach to service delivery	Knowledge to manage student caseload	Funds for establishing or advancing teacher preparation academies
			Increased collaboration	
			Provide supports to access general education curriculum	

Significance of Teacher Quality

Federal legislation highlighted the significance of teacher quality (Vernon-Dotson, Floyd, Dukes, & Darling, 2014) as teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions have a direct impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Rockoff, 2004) through implementing and evaluating evidence-based instructional methods (Little & Houston, 2003a). Teacher preparation is significant as instructional quality remains a determining factor for student performance (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Rivkin et al., 2005) and has a stronger correlation with student achievement than class size or school spending (Beare et al., 2012). Additionally, student performance is directly influenced by teachers' instructional practices (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Pressley et al., 2001; Rivkin et al., 2005; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampton, 1998). McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) stressed that "being taught by less effective teachers can have a devastating effect on achievement outcomes for students" (p. 296).

Accordingly, teachers will need preparation that provides them with the knowledge, skills, and experience in evidence-based instructional practices that have the potential to improve their teaching and improve student outcomes across content areas (Boardman et al. 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009; Pressley et al., 2001; Rock et al., 2016; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Special education teachers need to be able to address instructional demands (Fang, 2014; Fang & Pace, 2013; Fang, Schleppergrell, & Moore, 2014) within the MTSS framework to support the learning needs of at-risk

students and students with disabilities (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015).

Specifically, Leko and colleagues (2015) asserted that “to succeed in school contexts driven by MTSS and CCSS, SETs [special education teachers] need to have extensive knowledge of how to support students with disabilities in achieving rigorous content standards” (p. 26).

The increased expectations of teachers are reiterated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2012) who asserted that “setting high expectations for students require changes in the delivery of instruction” (p. 27).

Further, the CCSSO (2012) stressed that teacher preparation programs should be rigorous since setting “higher expectations of students have led to higher expectations for teaching and leading” (p. 27). Therefore, researchers have argued that teacher preparation programs should: (a) provide teachers with the knowledge necessary to be effective in their teaching practices (Boardman et al., 2005); (b) equip teachers with the skills necessary to evaluate, select, and implement evidence-based instructional strategies directly aligned with student needs (Batsche, 2014; Cook & Cook, 2013; Little & Houston, 2013a); (c) develop teacher’s ability to collaborate, communicate, and consult with various professionals (Brownell et al., 2010; Leko et al., 2015); and (d) make data-driven instructional decisions (Daly et al., 2007). Further, special education teachers are involved in the planning, construction, and design of instruction as well as in methods for effective delivery (Fuchs, Fahsl, & James, 2014) thereby highlighting the need for teacher preparation programs to provide instruction on aligning instruction with goals, objectives, and standards, increasing student engagement, modeling and scaffolding instruction, and highlighting critical information (Fuchs et al., 2014).

At-risk students and students with disabilities benefit from classrooms and instruction that are research- and evidence-based (Boardman et al. 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009; Little & King, 2008; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) has identified many of these evidence-based instructional strategies for improving reading and literacy outcomes. However, a gap between research and practice persists (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001). This gap leads teachers to disregard what they were taught in their preparation programs (Scheeler, Ruhl, & McAfee, 2004) and implement common and ineffective practices typically found in a K-12 classroom “dismissing those promoted by the university as ‘too theoretical’” (Smith, Anagnostopoulos, & Basmadjian, 2007, p. 2). Educators who used “advanced teaching practices” improved educational outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities (Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001).

Current preparation programs focus on providing pre-service teachers with pedagogical knowledge, but do not provide them with the experiences they need to implement that knowledge in the classroom. Teachers may benefit from: (a) knowing how their theoretical knowledge applies to a set of circumstances; (b) exhibiting the ability to retrieve necessary and relevant information easily; and (c) having flexibility in their instructional approach to new situations (MET Project, 2014). Teacher quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) and the knowledge and skills necessary to use and implement evidence-based practices with fidelity (Little & Houston, 2003b) are critical to realize the intent of *IDEA* and *ESSA* legislation. Students benefit from access to the instructional

supports and specially-designed instruction necessary to meet general education curriculum standards (Elish-Piper, 2016; Fuchs et al., 2014).

Teacher Preparation

Given the continued changes in the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher in light of legislative policies and reauthorizations, researchers and teacher educators stress the growing need for policies “that address and resolve issues related to clarifying the roles of special educators” (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 92). Shepherd and colleagues (2016) presented six recommendations for teacher preparation programs, researchers, and policy makers. The first of these recommendations included their belief that teacher preparation programs:

Develop a clear vision regarding the roles of special educators in today’s context:

This vision needs to acknowledge the complex roles that special educators must play in providing specialized instruction in the context of MTSS, high-stakes accountability, advances in technology, increasing student diversity, increased need for collaboration, and advances in the science of learning. (p. 92)

This recommendation is based on the belief that “students with disabilities deserve to be held to high standards while receiving specialized and evidence-based instruction designed to meet their individual needs” (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 92). Other recommendations included: (a) reforming teacher preparation programs to ensure effective preparation of all educators; (b) developing common evaluation tools that can measure preparedness of special educators; (c) revamping state licensure and credentialing systems; (d) increasing

accountability of special educators through high standards; and (e) supporting funding for research on the preparation and development of special educators at all levels (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Therefore, teacher preparation may consider a shift in its approach to preparing special educators for their new roles. As classrooms at the elementary level become more inclusive, many teacher preparation programs should focus on increased collaboration at the preparation level (Little & Crawford, 2002; Pugach, Blanton, & Correa, 2011). Teacher preparation could be enhanced through a collaborative approach that “is conducted in joint fashion, in teams comprised of teacher educators from special and general teacher education, across content areas” (Pugach, 2005, p. 578). Pugach, Blanton, and Boveda (2014) asserted that “by working together across general and special education at the preservice level, graduates will be better prepared to address the wide diversity of students they will reach, including those who have disabilities” (p. 144).

Although there is a strong need for collaboration between special educators and general educators, there is also a need to acknowledge the different roles they have within their schools and how those roles affect their preparation (Brownell, Ross, Colón, & McCallum, 2005; Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014). In contrast to general education teachers, special educators cited skills related to tailoring instruction through increased time or grouping strategies as important to student learning (Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014) and place a stronger emphasis on the organization and structure of the learning environment (Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014). General education teachers are more focused on providing content knowledge aligned with grade level standards to large groups of students.

However, special education teachers are focused on individualized instruction, intervention, and assessment of students (Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014). Federal legislation has emphasized the need for special education teachers to have *both*, content knowledge and individualized instruction knowledge (*NCLB*, 2001).

Supporting At-Risk Students and Students with Disabilities in the LRE

As reviewed in an earlier section about legislation impacting education for students with disabilities, federal legislation (*PL 94-142*, 1975) mandated provisions for special education services to students with disabilities in the LRE. Depending on the unique needs of each individual student, placement ranged from the general education classroom (least restrictive) to hospital bound care (most restrictive) within a continuum of special education services (Deno, 1970). With early implementation of the principle of the LRE, students with disabilities were often provided appropriate services in segregated settings within the public schools (Yell et al., 2011). However, segregated classroom placements have received increasing scrutiny. Wang and colleagues (1986) asserted that the practice of removing students with disabilities from the general education classroom was flawed because it attributed poor student performance to the characteristics of the student rather than to the quality of the learning environment. Further, researchers have argued when provided in segregated settings the variation in service delivery can be disjointed, inefficient, and inadequate for meeting the diverse needs of students (Bauwens et al., 1989; Glover & DiPerna, 2007).

Inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been shown to improve achievement and academic outcomes (Cook & Tankersley, 2013; Harn et al., 2014; Marston, 1996) for both students with and without disabilities. When included in general education, students with disabilities benefited both academically and socially (e.g., Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas., 2002; Todd, 2012; Tremblay, 2013). From 2005 to 2014, the number of students with disabilities educated in the general education classroom more than 80 percent of their day increased from 53.6 percent to 62.6 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). During the same period, the number of students spending less than 40 percent of their day in the general education classroom decreased from 16.6 percent to 13.5 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Improved academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities are dependent on access to the general education curriculum with appropriate supports and specially-designed education services (Rea et al., 2002; Todd, 2012; Tremblay, 2013); the role and quality of the teacher (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002); and, the use of evidence-based practices to meet the specific educational needs of students with disabilities (Little & Houston, 2003b). Each of these factors contributes to the academic and social outcomes through school until graduation, with the goal for 99 percent of all students, including students with disabilities, to successfully enter postsecondary settings (*ESSA*, 2015). Therefore, students must not only graduate from high school, but also continue education at a two- or four-year college, vocational training, or immediate entry into the workforce (*ESSA*, 2015; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015).

To meet these goals for students with disabilities, researchers argued that although students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom in increasing numbers, students with disabilities need appropriate supports and services that provide access to and mastery of the curriculum (Elish-Piper, 2016; McLeskey et al, 2011, NCII, 2016). Elish-Piper (2016) stated that while “we must set high standards for all students”, we must also “provide equally high support to help them reach those standards” (p. 111). Further, Elish-Piper (2016) asserted that without such supports some students will “endure failures associated with the quest to meet the standards, and see themselves as incompetent and unprepared for both college and careers” (p. 111).

Effective Instruction and Evidence-Based Practices

Students with disabilities are no longer as isolated from the general education classroom and are provided with more integrated learning experiences within a coordinated school-wide effort (Batsche, 2014). Effective implementation of a multi-tiered system includes collaboration, requires data-based decision-making, and employs evidence-based instructional strategies and materials for each tier of support (Harn, Chard, Biancarosa, & Kame’enui, 2011; Harn et al., 2014). These components (e.g., data-based decision-making, evidence-based practices) are required by legislation (e.g., *ESSA*, *IDEIA*, *NCLB*) to prepare students as college-and-career ready upon graduation (Cusumano, Algozzine, & Algozzine, 2014). Adopting an MTSS framework to provide supports to students seeks to maximize instructional time to meet the needs of a wider range of students across settings (Harn et al., 2014). According to Harn and colleagues,

“the multi-tiered approach to service delivery encompasses a coordinated and more inclusive approach to education, and it has demonstrated meaningful improvements in outcomes for students with a range of disabilities” (p. 230).

Research in educational pedagogy, evidence-based practices, and intervention has focused on instruction within the continuum of placement settings in special education and general education to improve learning outcomes of students with and without disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009). Specifically, in the field of special education, research has informed classroom practices and has strengthened the understanding of effective practices for students with disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005).

Figure 1 provides the key features of effective instruction identified by Vaughn and Bos (2012). According to Vaughn and Bos (2012), these features should be present in all teaching and require teachers to have the knowledge of how and when to implement them.

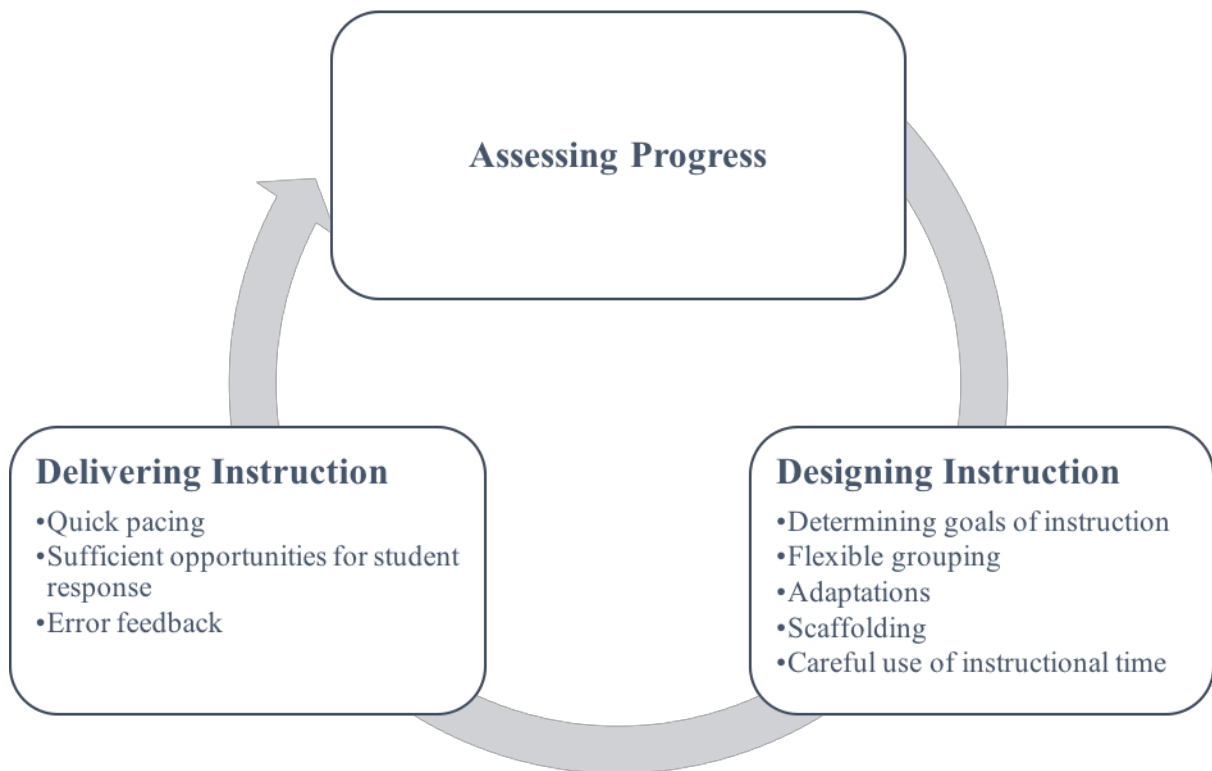


Figure 1: Features of Effective Instruction adapted from Vaughn and Bos (2012)

Evidence-based instructional practices (EBPs) are especially critical when working with diverse students, including those from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners (Matsumara, Garneir, & Spybrook, 2012). EBPs are instructional methods and techniques that meet a rigorous, prescribed set of research criteria and have been shown to have a statistically significant impact on student achievement when implemented with fidelity (Cook & Cook, 2013). EBPs can be defined as those practices that are “supported by empirical research and professional wisdom so that research-based

instructional methodologies could be implemented in the unique systems represented by each preK-12 public school” (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009, p. 3). *NCLB* (2004) previously defined scientifically-based practices (a.k.a., evidence-based practices) as those that involve “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (Title IX, Part A, Section 9101[37]). Research related to special education interventions has advanced the knowledge of prevention and instruction (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Research on interventions has informed the field on the environmental arrangements, assistive devices, and supports necessary for assisting and improving outcomes for students (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001).

To support the use of scientifically- and evidenced-based instructional practices, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded the creation of several national centers as resources for vetted evidence-based practices (e.g., What Works Clearinghouse, IRIS Center, Doing What Works, NCII). For example, the What Works Clearinghouse provides teachers with access to evidence-based instructional strategies and interventions that have been shown to significantly improve student outcomes. When selecting evidence-based instructional methods, teachers should do so with purpose. In addition, multiple instructional strategies should be used simultaneously to meet the individual and unique learning needs of students (Slanda & Little, In Press). By employing a variety of instructional methods simultaneously, teachers can assist students in acquiring new skills, building on previous knowledge, developing problem solving and critical thinking skills, and becoming more engaged and motivated learners (Mustafa & Cullingford, 2008). Instructional methods

should be research- and evidence-based and directly aligned with students' unique and individual needs. Instructional methods should be chosen for their inclusivity and their ability to support student learning (Slanda & Little, In Press).

Many of the instructional practices identified as effective for students with disabilities are effective for all students and can be implemented in the general education classroom. Ball and Forzani (2010) asserted, "Although teachers need to thoroughly understand the material they teach, that is not the same as knowing how to teach it" (p. 10). These instructional strategies are referred to as high-leverage practices (HLPs). Ball and Forzani (2011) defined HLPs as, "those activities of teaching which are essential; if they cannot discharge them competently, teachers are likely to face significant problems" (p. 19). Effective teaching requires teachers to know about their students and "their intellectual habits, misconceptions, and interests", as well as the "ways in which students' personal and cultural backgrounds bear on their work in school" (p. 20). Knowing this information allows teachers to provide appropriate instruction designed to meet their specific needs (Ball & Forzani, 2011).

High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) reflect a compilation of "frequently-used" practices that "have been shown to improve student outcomes" (McLeskey & Brownell, 2015, p. 7). Further, they are "practices that can be used to leverage student learning across content areas, grade levels, and student abilities and disabilities" (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 9). These HLPs can be used across grade levels, are important for student learning, and enhance and advance teaching (McLeskey et al., 2017; TeachingWorks, 2016). The Professional Standards and Practice Committee (PSPC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

working in collaboration with the CEEDAR Center and the Teacher Education Division (TED) of CEC identified and developed a set of 22 HLPs for special education teachers (McLeskey et al., 2017). The HLPs were organized in four areas of practice including: (a) collaboration, (b) assessment, (c) social/emotional/behavioral practices, and (d) instruction. Some HLPs included: (a) collaboration with school professionals; (b) interpreting and communicating assessment data to design education programs; (c) using explicit instruction and flexible grouping; (d) providing intensive instruction; (e) adapting curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals; and (f) using strategies to promote active student engagement (McLeskey et al., 2017).

Table 5 provides a complete list of HLPs reprinted from McLeskey and colleagues (2017).

Table 5:

High-Leverage Practices (Adapted from McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 17-26)

High-Leverage Practices in Special Education	
Collaboration	
HLP 1	Collaborate with professionals to increase student success
HLP 2	Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families
HLP 3	Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services
Assessment	
HLP 4	Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs
HLP 5	Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs
HLP 6	Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes
Social/Emotional/Behavioral	
HLP 7	Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment
HLP 8	Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior
HLP 9	Teach social behaviors
HLP 10	Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans
Instruction	
HLP 11	Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals
HLP 12	Systematically design instruction toward a specific learning goal
HLP 13	Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals
HLP 14	Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence
HLP 15	Provide scaffolded supports
HLP 16	Use explicit instruction
HLP 17	Use flexible grouping
HLP 18	Use strategies to promote active student engagement
HLP 19	Use assistive and instructional technologies
HLP 20	Provide intensive instruction
HLP 21	Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings
HLP 22	Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior

Literacy

The International Literacy Association (ILA) broadened the definition of reading to literacy which includes “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context” (ILA, n.d., n.p.). The ILA’s comprehensive definition of literacy reflects the changes in the increased reliance on multiple modes of literacy (e.g., media, technology) in a highly competitive 21st century workforce (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015) and are included in academic standards across content areas (e.g., Common Core State Standards).

Reading proficiency is correlated with academic success, high school graduation, and college attainment (Hough et al., 2013). Literacy not only remains a prerequisite for educational success, but student success is dependent on the ability to be literate in multiple disciplinary areas (Zygouris-Coe, 2012). Recent data from The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) reported that 40 percent of fourth grade students were at or above proficiency on grade level assessments in reading. The trend in NAEP reading scores for fourth grade students identified as students with disabilities was significantly lower with 12 percent of students with disabilities performing at or above proficiency. Sixty-seven percent of students with disabilities scored below the basic level of reading (NAEP, 2015).

These results indicate that students with disabilities continue to struggle to comprehend what they are reading, a skill necessary to be an effective reader (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Perfetti et al., 2005; Vaughn et al., 2012). Therefore, prevention and

intervention at the first indications of reading problems are critical, as students who fall behind may never catch up to their peers (Griffin et al., 1998; Reynolds et al., 2007). Students who do not “acquire key reading skills in the first two years of schooling suffer adverse effects that are very difficult to overcome in later years” (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 147). There is a tremendous need for early and immediate reading interventions that are specifically designed to meet the varied needs of individual students (Lose, 2007). Due to the significance of literacy for student success, research has supported students receiving intervention at the first sign of difficulty (Lose, 2007; Lose et al., 2007; O’Connor et al., 2013; Reynolds et al., 2007; Schwartz et al., 2012). This is especially critical as all students, including those with disabilities, must be prepared for a dynamic workforce with different skills and knowledge than previously required (Slanda & Little, in press). Increasingly rigorous state standards place a priority on building content knowledge through literacy initiatives such as effective communication, collaboration, and critical thinking (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2006; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2015). Federal mandates (e.g., *ESSA*, 2015) reiterated the need for increased rigor through the adoption of academic standards in literacy aligned with college and career goals. These ambitious standards-based reforms have implications for students with and without disabilities who struggle with basic reading skills (Elish-Piper, 2016).

Due to the importance of literacy and its impact on student outcomes across disciplines, decades of literacy initiatives and research focused on improving outcomes for struggling readers (Cassidy et al., 2016). The focus on early intervention, MTSS, and differentiated instruction to support struggling readers warrants continued and sustained

attention if all students are expected to be college and career ready upon graduation (Cassidy et al., 2016). The use of evidence-based practices, early intervention services, and specially-designed instruction and intervention is necessary to prepare at-risk students and students with disabilities to master rigorous standards.

Best Practices in Literacy Instruction

Literacy begins with emergent literacy skills which include oral language, print knowledge, and phonological awareness which provide the foundation upon which later academic success can be achieved (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Reading & Van Deuren, 2007). The major components of the reading process include: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension (Copeland et al., 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009).

Phonemic awareness is a skill in which children are able to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes (the smallest unit of sound). Children who have phonemic awareness can identify individual sounds within words, have a level of awareness of phonemes being associated with written words (graphemes), and understand basic concepts such as print direction (Copeland et al., 2011). Phonics extends the association of spoken sounds with letters to the printed words (Armbruster & Osborn, 2003). Phonics instruction includes teaching children that each phoneme is represented by a grapheme, and that each letter in the alphabet can have multiple sounds (Armbruster & Osborn, 2003). Fluency refers to the decoding of written words with automaticity and accuracy (Rasinski, 2003; Shanahan, 2006(a)(b)) and is a significant component of early literacy (Algozzine, Marr, Kavel, &

Dugan, 2009). Vocabulary acquisition begins early in life, and students who read more tend to have larger vocabularies. Vocabulary includes the words that students understand and are able to use in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Copeland et al., 2011). Finally, reading comprehension is the ability for children to read and understand what they are reading and relate that information to their own knowledge and schema (Armbruster & Osborn, 2003; Palincsar & Brown, 1986).

Each of these components is interdependent. Oral language is related to phonological awareness which impacts reading fluency (e.g., Ashby, Dix, Bontrager, Dey, & Archer, 2013), vocabulary skills (e.g., Bowey, 1994; Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Dehaene, Cohen, Morais, & Kolinsky, 2015; Saygin et al., 2013; Wagner, Torgesen, Laughon, Simmons, & Rashotte, 1993), and reading comprehension (e.g., Engen & Høien, 2002; Palincsar & Brown, 1986). Likewise, students who can decode words and read with automaticity and accuracy (i.e., fluently) have greater ability to comprehend what they read, making fluency a prerequisite for comprehension (Paige, Magpuri-Lavell, Rasinski, & Rupley, 2015; Rasinski, 2003; Rasinski, Rupley, Paige, & Nichols, 2016). To be able to read with proficiency, students must have a strong foundation that allows them to “focus their cognitive resources on creating meaning from text” (Paige et al., 2015, p. 103).

Intervention research demonstrates that there remains an assumption that struggling readers are incapable of acquiring beyond the basic literacy skills (Copeland et al., 2011; Kliewer & Biklen, 2001; Primeaux, 2000). Too often, instruction and interventions for struggling readers target sight words (Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Algozzine, 2006; Kliewer & Biklen, 2001), “decoding, rote drill, and other meaningless

practices” (Rasinski & Padak, 2000, p. 24). Such a narrowed focus translated to lowered expectations for struggling readers (Primeaux, 2000). Copeland and colleagues (2011) argued that, “students with extensive support needs may in fact profit from literacy instructional practices that are used with typically developing children” (p. 128). Reading instruction for proficient readers focuses on authentic reading tasks, increased reading time, and the sharing of their thoughts from their reading with others (Primeaux, 2000; Rasinski & Padak, 2000).

Reading is a complex and cognitively demanding task (Alfassi, 2004) that requires the use of multiple skills (Pullen & Cash, 2011). Reading requires students to actively engage in the text to construct meaning, make inferences, and interpret information to build upon previous knowledge (Oczukus, 2010; Shanahan, 2006a). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), reading does not improve by simply reading more books, but instead students must be explicitly taught the skills and strategies necessary to be effective readers. Students need the opportunity to interact with the text at multiple levels to gain meaning, improve fluency, and increase vocabulary (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007) and targeted instruction and intervention should provide such opportunities. Effective teachers in literacy, therefore, do not rely on one single instructional strategy, but implement multiple evidence-based practices and strategies to address each of the reading components as determined by student need (Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Ivey & Fisher, 2006).

The use of evidence-based instructional strategies will “alleviate reading deficits and lead to the development of skilled readers” (Pullen & Cash, 2011, p. 417). This process requires the collaboration of special and general education teachers who are versed in the

complexities of the five reading components (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) (Copeland et al., 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000; Paige et al., 2015; Rupley et al., 2009). Providing a system of supports that ensures that all students are able to read is crucial as “the attainment of reading skills is critical to success in school and in life” (Pullen & Cash, 2011, p. 417). To this end, the components of MTSS are designed to provide evidence-based instruction, early intervention services, and service delivery to students with disabilities to improve literacy outcomes (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007; 2009).

Multi-Tier System of Supports: Purpose and Structure

The use of EBPs within a multi-tier system to address the learning needs of students with and without disabilities is supported by research (e.g., Hoover, Baca, Wexler-Love, & Saenz, 2008) and is found in policy (Zirkel & Krohn, 2008). Previously established as a method for identification and eligibility for specific learning disabilities within *IDEA*, MTSS (previously known as RtI) placed a focus on intensifying supports for struggling students before they experienced failure. *IDEA* (2004) shifted the focus from these supports provided in another location (e.g., self-contained classroom or resource room) to their use in the general education classroom to instruct students with and without disabilities. MTSS extends the use of interventions to a wider population of students (e.g., gifted, English learners, early childhood) and extends supports across settings to include special and general education within school-wide settings (Batsche, 2014).

Wanzek and Vaughn (2009) outlined the essential features of MTSS:

(1) the use of rigorous scientifically-based research to facilitate decision-making, (2) universal screening to identify students at risk for academic problems, (3) assessment and progress monitoring to ensure students learning is monitored and appropriate instruction is provided, and (4) the increasingly more intensive treatment of students through appropriate prevention and then intervention treatments. (p. 151)

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a “three-tiered prevention model” that is “rooted in the general education framework” (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003, p. 139) and emphasizes a problem-solving approach and evidence-based practices (Batsche et al., 2005; Stoiber, 2014) that some researchers propose could *prevent* learning problems (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2009). Further, students “who struggle, as well as those with a learning disability, would benefit more from supplemental instruction that is aligned with Tier 1 instruction and, therefore, likely to extend and deepen students’ understanding and mastery of skills in the general education classroom” (Benedict, Park, Brownell, Lauterbach, & Kiely, 2013, p. 23). For students who are not responsive to preventative or intervention measures and instruction, MTSS provides a system for the identification for students who may be eligible for special education services. Murawski and Hughes (2009) identified the purpose of MTSS as two-fold: (a) to provide support in the general education classroom to struggling students and (b) to identify students with learning disabilities. Defining characteristics of MTSS include: (a) proactive instruction using evidence-based instructional practices; (b) preventative measures in which supports are immediately made available to students at the first sign of struggle; (c) data-driven instruction; (d) prolonged progress monitoring; and (e) intensifying intervention

that is specially-designed to meet individual needs of students (Barrio et al., 2015; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005, 2006, 2007; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) should be fluid, flexible, and responsive to students' academic and behavioral needs along a continuum of instructional supports within tiers. Tier 1 is considered universal classroom instruction in which all students receive evidence-based instruction designed to meet the majority of learning needs in the general education classroom. According to Balu and colleagues (2015), the intention of Tier 1 instruction is to prevent academic failure and to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education. In this tier, instruction is provided by the general education teacher (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Progress monitoring at this tier consists of benchmark testing at three pre-identified times during the school year to determine if students are making expected progress towards grade level standards through the current instructional practices (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003).

Students who show insufficient progress in Tier 1 instruction are provided with additional supports through intensified interventions in Tier 2. These supports supplement Tier 1 instruction (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007) and provide additional instruction in the general education classroom on a short-term basis (Bradley et al., 2007). Tier 2 interventions are conducted using increased instructional time (e.g., additional 30 minutes; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007), through reduced group size (e.g., 3-5 students; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012), and with the collaboration of a specialist and the general education teacher (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Tier 2 supports should be implemented in a coordinated and purposeful manner that provides students with additional opportunities to practice what they are learning

with guidance, increased progress monitoring, and reinforcement (Harn et al., 2014).

Increased progress monitoring is essential in Tier 2. It is often completed using curriculum-based measurements (Stecker, 2007) in more frequent intervals to assess and evaluate student progress and adjust intervention and instruction accordingly (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Tier 3 is the most intense level of intervention and provides the students with one-on-one instruction designed to meet their needs (NCII, 2016). Tier 3 is “characterized by regular and frequent monitoring of student performance and systematic testing of multiple alternative interventions in an effort to find approaches that work for individual students” (Deno, 2016, p. 23). In Tier 3, students may receive intervention and instruction by specialized personnel (e.g., special education teacher; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

Throughout the MTSS framework, instructional decisions are based on student progress determined by continuous progress monitoring. Progress monitoring consists of formative assessments that allow teachers to make instructional decisions about instructional strategies and procedures, materials used during instruction, or the curricula itself (Daly et al., 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). General and special educators can meet the needs of students through data collected from measures that are sensitive to and directly linked to the skill (Daly et al., 2007). Increasing intensity across the levels of each tier is achieved by implementing progressively teacher-centered, explicit instruction that is delivered more frequently for longer periods of time in smaller settings and by specialized instructors (Barrio et al., 2015; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In this way, the use of progress monitoring assessment data collected within the MTSS system can identify students with disabilities and determine eligibility for services precisely because “students with disabilities were more likely to

demonstrate insufficient response to interventions than students without disabilities”

(Vaughn et al., 2012, p. 516).

In a blueprint for practitioners, policymakers, and parents, Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) contended that there was a shared responsibility of students between general and special education that required collaboration and consultation to be consistent with the federal legislation (e.g., *IDEA* and *NCLB*) requirements. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2005), general education teachers assumed the primary responsibility for instruction and assessment during Tier 1 of MTSS. However, according to Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) for subsequent tiers (i.e., Tier 2 and 3), the responsibility was shared between teams of professionals consisting of both special and general education teachers. Further, beginning at Tier 2, Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) stress the importance of special education teachers collaborating with other professionals including school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and occupational therapists to assist students. Instruction at this tier can be conducted by classroom teacher, but Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) asserted that best practices would translate to a specialist providing the instruction. At Tiers 2 and 3, data are collected and analyzed by both the general and special education teacher and both teachers collaborate to determine instruction and intervention to assist students.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of the MTSS system.

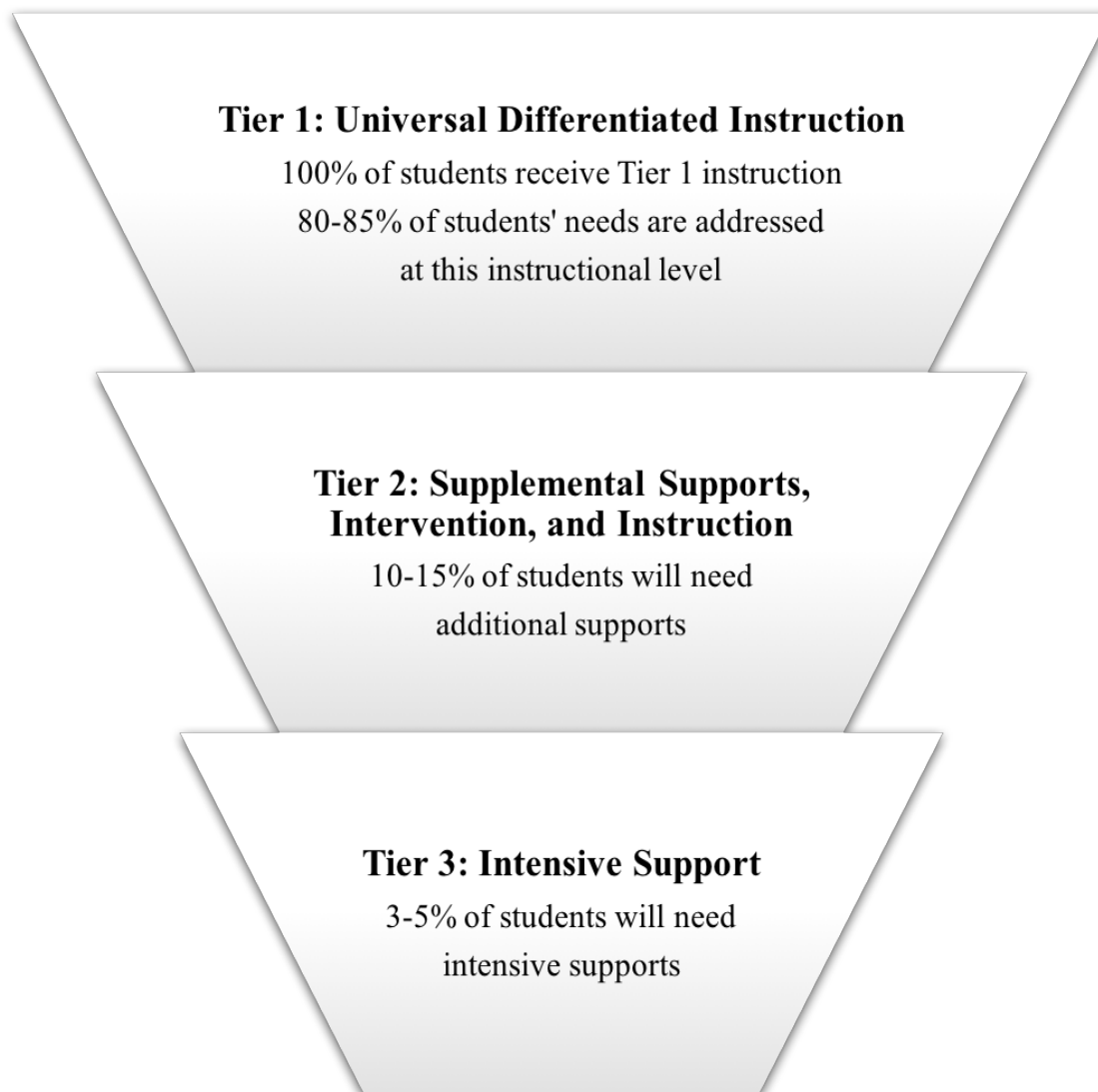


Figure 2: MTSS Tiered Structure

As stated, one of the goals of MTSS framework provides access to the general education curriculum. The use of MTSS can increase attention to evidence-based practices in the general education classroom, can serve to increase the range of powerful interventions for students who need them, and can improve the quality of special education services provided to students with disabilities (Shinn, Windram, & Bollman, 2016). Research has

shown that students who receive intensive instruction (e.g., Tier 3) are able to make significant gains when interventions are aligned with their specific needs (Shinn et al., 2016). MTSS serves as a “system for identifying struggling readers early in school and providing immediate short-term intervention without delays of formal evaluation” (O’Connor et al., 2013, p. 98) and as a system to determine eligibility for special education if students are not responsive to the short-term interventions (O’Connor et al., 2013). Studies have shown that interventions for struggling students are effective when instruction is intensified and responsive to student needs using a wide range of evidence-based instructional strategies (Batsche, 2014).

Contextual Factors of MTSS Implementation

As previously stated, one of the revisions of *IDEA* (2004) allowed states to replace the discrepancy model with problem-solving approaches (i.e., MTSS) to identify students with a specific learning disability (SLD) and to provide specially-designed, evidence-based instruction to students for prevention and early intervention. Research conducted by Berkeley and colleagues (2009) explored the progress of the implementation of MTSS across the nation per state. Early implementation information about MTSS found that: (a) MTSS implementation varied widely across the country, with some states emphasizing some of the above-listed categories more than others and, (b) policy and procedural decisions about MTSS implementation were not always conducted at the state level, but also occurred at the district level. These variations from state-to-state and district-to-district make it important to

situate this study in the state in which it occurs and provide an explanation of the state's model of MTSS.

Given that, this section reports the state policies in which this research was conducted to set the context for the research. MTSS was defined as a “multi-tiered approach to providing services and interventions to students at increasing levels of intensity based on progress monitoring and data analysis” (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006, p. 1). Within the MTSS framework, state policies require educators to use a “rate of progress over time” formula to make educational decisions and make decisions about special education eligibility (p. 1). The state policy governing the tiers of instruction was aligned with research and literature on MTSS as described in detail in the previous section. In sum, state policy delineates a three-tiered MTSS model to identify specific skill deficits and address those deficits through specially-designed instruction that utilizes evidence-based interventions, sensitive and responsive to student needs in design, frequency and immediacy.

Table 6 is adapted from information provided in a state policy publication (Technical Assistance Paper-TAP; 2006) and summarizes each tier, including the roles and responsibilities and personnel, without specific assignments noted for each personnel position.

Table 6:

Tiers, Personnel Involved, and Focus of Instruction (Adapted from TAP, 2006)

Tier	Personnel Involved	Focus
Tier 1	Student identified as at-risk of academic failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core instruction using evidence-based instructional practices to access general education curriculum • School wide screening (3 times per year)
	Parent/Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze and evaluate effectiveness of general education curriculum
	General Education Teacher(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and document rate of academic growth of all students • Adjust instructional strategies and grouping practices for all students (differentiation of instruction)
	Site-Based Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document interventions and student growth
	Instructional Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify students who continue to struggle academically when compared to their peers
Tier 2	Students who require additional supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor growth for all students in the class • Individual screenings
	Parent/Guardian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify specific strengths and weaknesses of individual students
	General Education Teacher(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers and assess outcomes related to those barriers • Integrity of classroom instruction is evaluated and monitored by administrator(s) or instructional coach(es)
	Site-Based Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions are made about effectiveness of instruction
	Instructional Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional strategies are adjusted based on student need • Scripted/structured intervention designed and delivered for use systematically across small groups of students
	Student Services Personnel (e.g., intervention specialists)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplemental intervention (in addition to Tier 1) that increases the academic engagement time
	Exceptional Student Education Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress monitoring on a more frequent basis • Narrowed focus of instruction to maximize impact

Tier	Personnel Involved	Focus
Tier 3	Students who require intensive supports and interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and implement targeted, specially-designed instruction that is intense and focused in small groups on individually • Individual assessments that can be analyzed for specific patterns • Multiple interventions simultaneously • Additional interventions that increase instructional time and given in addition to Tier 1 instruction • Interventions may or may not include special education provisions
	Parent/Guardian	
	General Education Teacher(s)	
	Site-Based Administrators	
	Instructional Coaches	
	Student Services Personnel (e.g., intervention specialists)	
	Exceptional Student Education Teachers	

In addition, state policies stated that “accountability for positive outcomes for all students is the shared responsibility of all personnel” and that “knowledge and skill will determine an individual’s role rather than professional title or assignment” (p. 10). Further, this section provided a list of possible members of the multi-disciplinary team, which included the special education teacher. Various professionals are added to the team as needed and based on intensity and frequency of the intervention. This report recognized the need for specially trained staff, “school staff must possess skills in the necessary assessment and intervention practices” (p.12) within the MTSS framework.

State policy requires specially-designed instruction and intervention for students with disabilities to be provided within the MTSS framework. Once students become eligible for special education services, they are guaranteed specially-designed instruction that meets their academic needs. The interventions, supports, and progress monitoring provided within the MTSS framework before identification should be sustained once eligibility is determined and provided in the LRE. The collaborative relationship between the special education teacher and the general education teacher is maintained as they work jointly to help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum and master grade level standards.

Role of the Special Education Teacher

Sindelar and colleagues (2014) asserted, “the role of special educators are highly complex and evolving, and they are likely to differ from school to school, from teacher to teacher, and from year to year” (p. 9). The role of the special education teacher is influenced by the way schools implement MTSS, which has blurred the line between special education

and general education (Fuchs et al., 2010). Because MTSS implementation varies greatly, MTSS creates a framework within which the role of the special education teacher is not clearly defined. Sindelar and colleagues (2014) stated,

both special and general educators have responsibility for assessing and intervening with students who are at-risk. Although special education teacher roles in this process have not been clearly defined, they may include interpreting assessment data, planning interventions, providing direct instruction of individuals or small groups, evaluating and modifying support systems, and participating in ongoing system-wide evaluation. (p. 9)

The implementation of MTSS in schools and districts across the nation shifted the role of the special education teacher. Fuchs and colleagues (2010) suggested that there was a “different, distinctive, and important role for special education” (p. 301) and in this new role “the general education-special education distinction virtually disappears” (p. 308). Although MTSS began as a special education initiative, it has been included in general education reform initiatives (e.g., *ESSA*) and has implications for special educators who must provide supports for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. A shared responsibility between special educators and general educators again was described and considered necessary to provide at-risk students with prevention and intervention, as well as to provide students with disabilities with an appropriate, individualized education (Deshler, Schumaker & Woodruff, 2004; Will, 1986).

General education and special education teachers must be prepared to implement collaborative teaching models to facilitate inclusion and provide individualized and specially-

designed instruction with appropriate supports (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). However, collaboration brings ambiguity to the role of the special educator (McKenzie, 2009) as their “expertise is utilized (or underutilized) in inclusive settings” (Sindelar et al., 2014, p. 9).

Research has indicated that general education teachers often feel unprepared to meet the diverse and varied learning needs of students in their classroom (Barrio et al., 2015). This perceived lack of preparation is problematic since the general education teacher is the first point of instruction (e.g., Tier 1), intervention, and evaluation in the MTSS process (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Murawski & Hughes, 2009), as the expertise of the special education teacher is not typically provided until Tier 2 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). As students are screened and enter Tier 2 or Tier 3 of the problem-solving structure (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005), the general education teacher’s expertise in a content area and the special educator’s knowledge of strategies and supports for students with disabilities collaboratively resolve instructional concerns (Scanlon & Baker, 2012; Wang & Reynolds, 1996). Brownell and colleagues (2010) asserted “perspectives on disabilities, effective practice, and providing services to students with disabilities have led to changes in how special education is conceptualized and organized” (p. 357).

Teaching in the general education classroom has been characterized by undifferentiated, whole group instruction where students with disabilities are only superficially engaged in academic tasks (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005). Collaboration with other teachers supports differentiated instruction for increased access the general education curriculum (Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). As the general education classroom becomes

more inclusive and grade level standards become increasingly rigorous, teachers must be prepared to adapt their teaching practices. Teachers must be prepared to promote learning at deeper levels and engage students in meaningful activities that involve higher order thinking skills (Slanda & Little, In Press). Education of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum means that qualified and knowledgeable special and general education teachers differentiate their instruction and provide accommodations consistent with students' learning needs (e.g., Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). However, there needs to be clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher in the collaborative and inclusive setting.

Historically, special education teachers have assumed the responsibility of designing and differentiating instruction to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Providing specially-designed services and instruction has been the cornerstone of special education. However, this role is changing when considered within the MTSS framework. MTSS integrates general education with special education. This integration leads to a “blurring of special education” (Fuchs et al., 2005, p. 308) that requires careful and thoughtful consideration of the role of the special education teacher in the general education setting. Cummings, Atkins, Allison, and Cole (2008) stated that the role of the special education teacher is critical to the MTSS system especially when considering their “value” within the system.

The success of core instruction with all students in special education becomes a critical determination. It is most likely the success or failure of this differentiated core instruction that leads to potential referral for additional services, which in many

cases includes special education. How special education teachers position themselves to support and supplement core instruction or align themselves to provide intensive intervention is critical to this process in general, and specifically to the special education teachers' value in the system. (p. 29)

Cummings and colleagues (2008) posited that the role of the special educator has changed within four main domains: (a) assessment, (b) testing instruments, (c) intervention, and (d) professional environment.

Table 7 provides a synopsis of these changes and is adapted from Cummings and colleagues (2008, p. 29). Albeit these domains are not comprehensive, they describe the various responsibilities of the changing roles of the special educator.

Table 7:

Role of Special Education Teachers within RTI (Cummings et al., 2008)

Domain	Historical Context	MTSS Context
Assessment	Begins with referral to special education	Begins with universal screening
Testing Instrument	Single Assessment	Conducted as baseline, before recognition of serious learning problems Multiple Assessments
	Summative	Formative
Intervention	Global achievement test Intensive instruction	Differentiated instruction
	Stagnant group of students	Variety of students Grouping is flexible and dynamic
Professional Environment	Isolated, secluded	Collaborative
	Infrequent collaboration with general education	Consultative

Further, Cummings and colleagues (2008) listed four key activities for special education teachers within RTI (later known as MTSS). First, special education teachers are responsible for evaluating a student’s progress towards mastery of academic standards through universal screening assessments. Second, they “assist in the consideration of scientifically based instructional strategies” by utilizing their expertise in recognizing error patterns in student reasoning to enhance “educational diagnosis” (Cummings et al., 2008, p. 29). Third, they work collaboratively with other educational professionals to “provide modeling, support, and feedback...regarding intervention implementation” and assist with

detailed data analysis and interpretation (Cummings et al., 2008, p. 29). Finally, special education teachers actively participate in the sustained progress monitoring of students to continuously evaluate student progress.

MTSS Implementation

The current study was focused on researching the roles and responsibilities of special educators during implementation of the recently-mandated MTSS educational framework. Previous research illuminated findings during initial implementation of MTSS. Research conducted by Balu and colleagues (2015) for the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEEER) studied the impact of MTSS implementation in real world settings. Researchers gathered data from school records and surveyed school personnel regarding small group reading services within 146 schools in 13 states and 45 school districts that implemented MTSS to support reading and literacy instruction and intervention for elementary-aged students. Balu (2016) indicated that there were variations in multiple areas: (a) rules on student assignment to various tiers of instruction; (b) standardized procedures and practices; and (c) organizational procedures during MTSS implementation. Across schools, implementation of MTSS varied in time allocated for Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention, the intensity of the interventions provided, and organization of services. For example, Balu (2016) pointed out that some schools used a single assessment to screen students for intervention, while other schools employed multiple screening assessments to determine student placement in the tiers. A major finding of this study was “that MTSS did not improve reading outcomes; it produced negative impacts” (Balu et al.,

2015, p. 1). Balu (2016) stressed that the “results do not mean that use of RtI practices or framework as a whole is ineffective” (Slide 14). Specifically, Balu (2016) stated that possible explanations for the negative finding could be attributed to identification procedures or to problems with the intervention themselves (e.g., mismatch between intervention and student need, replacement not supplementing of core instruction with intervention). In fact, Balu (2016) listed the following as conclusions that cannot be drawn from this study:

- “Effectiveness of the RtI framework as a whole
- Impacts of RtI on identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities
- Fidelity with which schools implemented the framework
- Effectiveness of specific Tier 2 or 3 reading intervention series
- Quality of instruction or intervention”

(Balu, 2016, Slide 30)

Although there is a consensus on the tenets of MTSS, there is a wide variation in its implementation. Balu (2016) pointed out that other studies found variations in the implementation of tiered systems of support including studies by Mellard, McKnight, and Woods (2009) and Vadasy, Sanders, and Tudor (2007). Batsche (2014) concurred by asserting a difference exists between a “multi-tiered method of delivering instruction and a multi-tiered system of supports” (p. 184). Specifically, a multi-tiered method of delivering instruction translates to “different tiers by different providers who are focused on different priorities” and “use different instructional and performance strategies” (Batsche, 2014, p. 184). Rather, a multi-tiered system of supports is used for service delivery for all students in a concerted manner that includes instruction that is evidence-based, aligned with rigorous

standards, and integrated (Batsche, 2014).

These issues in variation of implementation highlight the growing concern and need to understand the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS process to best determine what knowledge and skills are required to provide service delivery, instruction, and intervention with fidelity to improve student outcomes. In a grounded theory study in an urban elementary school conducted by Rinaldi, Averill, and Stuart (2010/2011), participants identified specific characteristics of successful implementation of an MTSS framework within their schools. The significant themes that emerged from this grounded theory included: (a) significant improvements in practice stemmed from both increased data collection and increased collaboration among all professionals within the school; (b) fewer inappropriate referrals to special education; and (c) a shift in school culture that fostered a collective responsibility for the learning of all students. Rinaldi and colleagues (2010/2011) stressed the importance of collaboration between professionals beginning at Tier 1 instruction. In this study, Rinaldi and colleagues (2010/2011) concluded that enhancing and improving instruction was a collaborative initiative and was instrumental in improving instructional practices to address curriculum standards. One of the themes that emerged from this grounded theory was the influence of data and collaboration on improving practice. Specifically, general education teacher participants in this study

indicated that the RtI model was effective because they were given time to engage in collaborative problem solving with regard to the implementing instructional interventions within a framework that used data to inform instruction. (Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011, p. 48)

In sum, Rinaldi and colleagues (2010/2011) concluded, “collaborative structures, related professional development, and co-shared leadership supported the implementation process and contributed to the effectiveness of the model” (p. 43).

In a study conducted by Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2012), 142 elementary school educators who participated in the MTSS process in reading were surveyed to assess their knowledge of reading instruction, assessment, evidence-based instructional practices, and interventions within the MTSS framework. General educators performed comparably to the special educators on the survey in all areas except for knowledge related to MTSS. All participants in this study demonstrated their knowledge of reading instruction and had the highest mean scores on the fluency/vocabulary/comprehension subscale of the survey. The lowest mean scores were on the assessment and MTSS subscales indicating that participants were not as versed in interventions for students and lacked understanding using curriculum-based measures (CBM) for screening and progress monitoring. Further, results from this study indicated that there was a positive relationship between years of teaching experience and professional development on the knowledge survey. Additionally, findings from this study indicated that teachers “lacked familiarity” with “well-designed, research-based interventions and instructional approaches” which would be valuable resources to them when making instructional decisions (Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012, p. 1715). Spear-Swerling and Cheesman (2012) claimed that this lack of knowledge was concerning because if teachers lacked familiarity with known evidence-based instructional practices and resources, then they would be left to design their own interventions and materials which is “unreasonable” (p. 1715) given all the other professional demands on teachers.

In a qualitative study conducted by Swanson and colleagues (2012), one of the research questions focused on teacher perceptions of MTSS. All participants in this study were special education teachers ($N = 12$). During interviews, participants indicated that the greatest benefits of MTSS were: (a) early identification of students who may need supports; (b) intervention using specially-designed instruction; and (c) increased collaboration with other professionals and a sharing of student responsibility. In this study, one of the participants stated, “[s]ome kids need extra assistance, smaller groups, more intensive instruction, but they are not eligible to receive special education services. So, it is nice that they can still be taught by us” (Swanson et al., 2012, p. 120). This statement from a participant illustrated the blurring of the line between special education and general education previously suggested by Fuchs and colleagues (2010). Therefore, the reach of special education teachers could extend into the general education classroom to not only provide specially-designed instruction to students with IEPs, but to also benefit students who require extra support and are not eligible for special education services.

One of the common themes across these studies was the importance of collaboration. Sindelar and colleagues (2014) asserted that special and general education teachers will have a greater need for collaboration within the MTSS framework, and as service delivery continues to evolve the impact of MTSS will be realized in teacher preparation programs (Brownell et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2010). Additionally, federal legislation not only prompted the use of MTSS, but also has consequently increased collaboration between professionals. The “highly-qualified” teacher requirement established by *NCLB* required special education teachers to seek certification and establish competency in subject areas

(Geiger et al., 2014; Sayeski & Higgins, 2014). Even though *ESSA* removed the highly qualified requirement, it is still unknown what steps will be taken regarding the qualifications of special educators moving forward. The Department of Education in the state in which this study takes place issued a statement that the highly qualified requirement will continue to be in effect for the 2016-2017 school year (FDOE, 2016). However, no statement has been issued regarding subsequent years regarding certification or qualification requirements needed by special education teachers.

The lack of clarity in the role and responsibilities of the special education teachers who are typically assigned additional responsibilities at the discretion of their schools has led to role confusion (Billingsley, Crockett, & Kamman, 2014; Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, & Israel, 2009). Rock and colleagues (2016) asserted that role confusion, or ambiguity, is the result of several factors including: “(a) teaching in a variety of settings such as self-contained classrooms or special schools, resource rooms, general education classrooms; (b) collaborating with diverse professionals in an assortment of roles, including co-teaching, team teaching, facilitation, and supervision of para educators; and (c) providing direct instruction to students with a variety of needs and disabilities across multiple grade levels and subject matter (academic and non-academic)” (p. 99).

The changing expectations translate to uncertainties. These uncertainties are “magnified by a lack of administrative support” and the lack of “leadership needed to ensure that general and special education systems support one another” (Rock et al., 2016, p. 99).

Theoretical Underpinnings

The recent reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015)*, has renewed concerns about the implementation of MTSS at school level which have been raised by scholars (e.g., Thorius et al., 2014), highlighted in federal reports (e.g., Balu et al., 2015), and voiced by school personnel (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). MTSS is an equity-focused reform with the goal to improve educational access and outcomes for all students, including those from previously marginalized groups. The implementation of MTSS has affected the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher, including the provision of specially-designed instruction for student with disabilities and intervention and instruction for at-risk students (Brownell et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2010). There is a need to examine how MTSS is implemented at the local level through a comprehensive examination of the changing roles and responsibilities of special education teachers to inform future policy. The study of the implementation of policies such as MTSS is critical as there are multiple stages and levels at which policy is implemented. There can be unanticipated consequences and impacts of implementation due to local institutional effects on its implementation (Levinson et al., 2009) which are shaped by school culture. School culture in this study was considered within Welner's (2001) *Zone of Mediation (ZoM)*. Consistent with phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013), Welner's ZoM was used to develop and guide the study design and inform interview questions rather than as an instrument for data analysis.

Welner's ZoM is a theoretical framework that sheds light on a more persistent issue that exists when educational reform stems from federal mandates, which often do not

consider local, political, or social structures that shape reform movements (Welner, 2001). Enacting change, especially within schools, can be a difficult task and is often faced with normative and political obstacles (Renee, Welner, & Oakes, 2010). Change within school systems, especially change that upsets the status quo, creates conflict and discord (Welner, 2001). According to Welner (2001), this discord stems from “(a) political conflict over resources that are perceived to be scarce, and (b) ideological conflict over societal values and beliefs as they are acted out in schools” (p. 94).

The ZoM stems from Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* and builds on the *Zone of Tolerance (ZoT)* developed by McGivney and Moynihan (1972). Vygotsky’s ZPD theory has been applied to educational reform movements (McKenney, 2013) and provided a framework for understanding how educational reform was negotiated between independent understandings and scaffolded movements. The *ZoT* (McGivney & Moynihan, 1972) described the resistance to reform and changes in roles and responsibilities of professionals that arises from the conflict of competing agendas between local communities and national policies. The roles and responsibilities of the educator are typically determined at the school level by district personnel and administrators who rely on their own understandings of the policy and procedure (Spillane, 2004). These understandings are negotiated between their perceived understanding of the policy and procedure and the personnel resources to which they have access. Although district personnel and administrators consider established federal guidelines and state certification requirements in their allocation of roles and responsibilities of personnel in the implementation of policies,

they also apply their own beliefs regarding personnel for carrying out those roles and responsibilities.

Welner's (2001) framework includes four intersecting forces that collectively create the ZoM. Considering the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers within this framework provides a greater understanding to the changing role of the special education teacher. Welner (2001) described schools as sites for mediating these four forces and conflicts. Welner opined that school location and context matter for understanding "the impact of these forces (and other)" and "is central to understanding the overall fate of a reform as well as the reform's effect on specific populations" (p. 98). Welner (2001) argued that these factors are not separable from their contexts and must be considered when investigating educational reforms at the local school level. Figure 3 provides a synopsis of the four forces with an explanation of each.

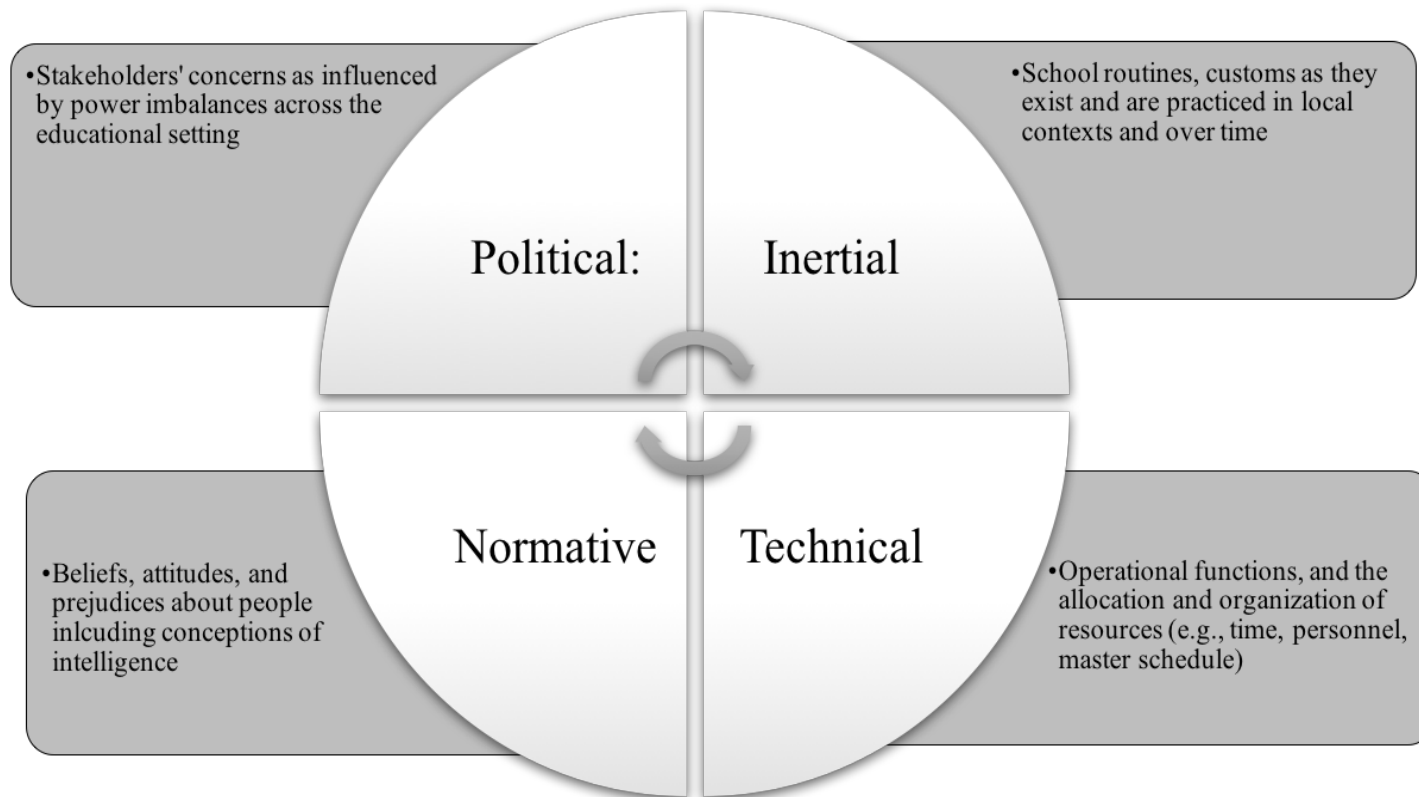


Figure 3: Four Intersecting Forces that Create the ZoM (Welner, 2001)

Educational policies such as MTSS are often met with resistance because they “aim to benefit students and parents who hold less powerful positions in school and communities” (Welner, 2001, p. xvii). Further, policies such as MTSS are often handed down with little consideration for the roles and responsibilities of those required to implement them (e.g., special education teacher, general education teacher) and the increased work associated with them (e.g., increased paperwork, increased student workload).

Summary

The changing roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within an MTSS educational framework needed to be studied. Research needed to determine knowledge, competencies, and skills of special education teachers to improve student achievement, collaborate within the MTSS educational framework, and provide unique and specialized service to identified students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010; Greenwood & Kim, 2012; McDonald et al., 2011). The sustainability of new policies and procedures, such as MTSS, is dependent on the skill set of those involved in any aspect of its implementation (Castillo et al., 2015; Hord & Rousin, 2013). This need is significant as MTSS has the “potential to impact numerous areas of teaching practice, including data-based inquiry, problem-solving, collaboration, and instructional techniques across curricula” (Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011, p. 44).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intent of this study was to understand changes of the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher because of federal legislation such as *IDEA*, *NCLB*, and most recently, *ESSA*. These mandates have emphasized the need for special education teachers within public schools to rethink their roles, work collaboratively, and provide responsive, evidence-based instruction and intervention (Fuchs et al., 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; Tremblay, 2013) in the general education classroom to improve student outcomes. There was a need to learn about the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers during implementation of the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) (*ESSA*, 2015) and concomitantly the delivery of specialized, unique services to students with disabilities (Batsche, 2014; Bradley et al., 2005; *PL 94-142*, 1975). A qualitative research design was used to examine the roles and responsibilities as depicted from the lived experiences of current special education teachers.

Qualitative research studies have the potential to capture and communicate a participant's experience in such a way that it elucidates practices, processes, and outcomes critical to decision-making by practitioners and policymakers (Patton, 2002). Through inductive and deductive reasoning, qualitative research provides data that has the potential to reveal insight to complex systems and processes (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to gain a "complex, detailed understanding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) of an issue, a problem, or a phenomenon in its natural setting.

Additionally, analysis of a phenomenon serves to provide the researcher with an understanding of an elaborate phenomenon as it exists through the development of theories sensitive to the setting within which they exist (Khan, 2014). In a qualitative inquiry, the researcher is not interested in manipulating the phenomena of interest, but rather is concerned with understanding it as it exists with no predetermined or pre-established course (Guba, 1978; Patton, 2002). Further, a qualitative study built on a phenomenological approach to understanding the lived experiences of special education teachers allowed the researcher to study constructs that are often taken for granted, yet are critical to educational practice and research (Cocek, 2012).

This chapter presents a summary of the methodology used to investigate special education teachers' roles and responsibilities in public school districts in the southeast United States. This chapter begins with the purpose of the study, lists the research questions that framed the qualitative investigation, and provides a rationale for the study design. This chapter further includes the bracketing process, sampling procedures and participant recruitment, data collection procedures, and ends with a detailed explanation of the data analysis procedures.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided supports to students in the general education classroom in elementary schools. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe special education teachers' lived experiences to gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Further, the roles and

responsibilities of the participating teachers were considered with respect to two different populations of students. The first group included students who were identified as having a disability, received supports and accommodations in accordance with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and received special education services consistent with the Part B of the *IDEA* requirement of delivering specialized services. Second, this study investigated the role and responsibilities of special education teachers with the delivery of intervention and instruction for students who had not yet been identified as having a disability, but required additional supports and instruction to meet grade level standards (Elish-Piper, 2016). The distinction of these two groups of students was essential for understanding the evolving role of special education teachers who are increasingly teaching students in the general education settings and collaborating with general education teachers.

To describe the roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers, the researcher conducted extensive interviews with multiple participants and analyzed the data for relevant units of meaning and common themes. For the purposes of this study, MTSS was defined as “a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based, systemic practices to support a rapid response to students’ needs, with regular observation to facilitate data-based instructional decisionmaking (sic)” (*ESSA*, 2015). In this study, MTSS was a tiered support system that included three tiers of successively intensifying supports that employed evidence-based instructional strategies aimed to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing challenges in meeting grade level academic standards. Data collected in this study produced results to inform the field of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers working in inclusive settings.

Research Questions

The research questions explored in this study guided the type of qualitative method used to explain and describe the phenomena investigated. Specifically, this study utilized a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013; Odman & Kerdeman, 1999) to illuminate the lived experiences of special education teachers who work in elementary schools. Originally, this study explored two fundamental research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who are involved in the MTSS process in elementary schools?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with MTSS?

However, the research questions changed as data were collected (Creswell, 2013) on the phenomena of the roles of special education teachers within MTSS. This change was warranted based on data collected. Despite state legislation stipulating the participation of special education teachers beginning at Tier 2 intervention and instruction within the MTSS structure, data from all participants indicated that special education teachers were not involved in the MTSS process prior to students identified for special education services. Detailed information on this finding is provided in Chapter 4. The research questions for this study were updated to reflect this finding. The research questions were amended to reflect the following:

1. What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who provide supports for students in inclusive settings in elementary schools?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with providing supports in inclusive settings?

Research Design

Background of the Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999; van Manen, 1990) phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997) to answer the research questions. A phenomenological study facilitated data collection of thick, rich descriptions of each individual's lived experience of the phenomena as they perceived it and experienced it (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) within their diverse school settings. By exposing multiple individual's personal experiences of the phenomenon, the researcher was able to reveal common conceptions, themes, and essences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) through detailed descriptions of those shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). In accordance with phenomenological study designs, the goal of the researcher in this study was to "describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 5) in an effort to understand its essential structure (Sanders, 2003) and arrive at an ultimate truth (Solomon & Higgins, 1996).

Phenomenological research designs are rooted in twentieth-century philosophy and have a long history of use in social sciences, health sciences, nursing, and education (Creswell, 2013). Edmond Husserl (1859 – 1938), a German mathematician and philosopher, was described as the "fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century" (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11). Husserl coined the term "phenomenology" which was defined as the science of phenomena (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (2004), Husserl asserted that the essence of a phenomenon could be drawn from data related to one's own experience, perception, and memory. Merleau-Ponty (1956) described

phenomenology as a “study of the essences” and “an attempt to define an essence, the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness” (p. 59). Phenomenology examines the phenomena as it currently exists which “precedes reflection as we are already there” (Merleau-Ponty, 1956, p. 59). Phenomenological research permits the researcher to examine the phenomena as an individual experiences it in its unprocessed form in which its basis is captured before it has been defined, categorized, classified, analyzed, or reflected upon (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1956; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973; Valle & King, 1978; van Manen, 1990). In this way, a phenomenological study offers insights connected to the world in which we live (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

A phenomenological approach allows the reader to understand the phenomena as it exists without intervention on the part of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Van Kaam (1966) drew comparison of a phenomenology to an experimental design by emphasizing the fact that a phenomenology exposes the full meaning of the construct while an experimental design may serve to distort that meaning due to the process of controlling one or more variables. Phenomenology allows data to emerge without the researcher providing guidance or controlling variables in the environment. A phenomenology is based on the existence of the phenomena that can only be derived from a direct experience with the phenomena and cannot be attained through indirect knowledge of the phenomena (Gadamer, 1989). Moreover, a phenomenology provides a way to describe an experience as lived without attributing causal explanations for its existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Merleau-Ponty (1956) affirmed a Husserl approach to phenomenology when he defined the original

philosophical intent of a phenomenological application as a “question of description, and not of explanation or analysis” (p. 60).

Many philosophers, including Husserl, believed that a level of “reduction” of a phenomenon was necessary in a phenomenological study as it is impossible to remove bias and/or perception from description (Chenail, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Bias is inherent since all human experiences influence our understanding of the world around us (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Therefore, there must be a process in which the researcher sets aside those biases by acknowledging their existence. The process of *reduction* (Merleau-Ponty, 1956) was described by Moustakas (1994) using the Greek word epoché. Epoché is a process in which the researcher sets aside their “prejudgments, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Epoché requires the researcher to set aside their previous knowledge, which may affect the experience as described by the participant. The norms or standards with which a person would usually view the world are deliberately not applied in a phenomenological study to allow for receptiveness and transparency (Moustakas, 1994). Building on this premise, van Manen (1990) stated the importance of examining pedagogy through a phenomenological lens permits the interpretation of one’s lived experience with certain sensitivity to that lived experience.

Phenomenology

Embree (1997) identified seven different approaches to phenomenology. These seven approaches included descriptive, naturalistic constitutive, existential, generative historicist,

genetic, hermeneutic, and realist. Of these seven approaches, descriptive and hermeneutic are the two most often used in educational research (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). In a descriptive phenomenological approach, the researcher describes the phenomenon allowing the reader to interpret the data described. The researcher makes meaning of the data by interpreting and examining the language used during data collection (Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Phenomenology explores a sense of the individual “which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character” of the individual (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, “to do research is always to question the way we experience the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

In addition to the detailed description of a phenomenon, a phenomenological approach grants the researcher the ability to interpret the data collected. The interpretation of data is “endemic to and definitive mark of human existence” (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 184). Van Manen (1997) asserted that interpretation permits the researcher to,

transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

Once the lived experience is described, the researcher engages in a process of clarifying and making explicit meaning of that lived experience (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1997). The process of interpretation allows the researcher to make pedagogical meaning of that experience as the researcher mediates between different meanings of those experiences (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 1997). However, Gadamer (1989) cautioned

that phenomenology must be a deliberate activity in which the researcher avoids misinterpretation. The researcher must view the data with objectivity and not use their own experiences or presuppositions to interpret the participant's experiences (Wareing, 2011). As such, the researcher in this study stated positionality prior to beginning the study, participated in a bracketing interview prior to data collection, and utilized a peer-debriefer to validate findings. Each of these actions allowed the researcher to set aside preconceived ideas of the phenomenon and take cautionary strides to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

Rationale for Research Design

Qualitative studies have shaped the field of special education in multiple ways by highlighting and evidencing the experiences of students with disabilities, their families, and special education teachers and administrators responsible for their education (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Data collected through interviews (Creswell, 2013) have provided the field much needed descriptive information that has been used to inform policy and procedure to improve outcomes for students with disabilities who have a history of marginalization (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Further, data collected from interviews allowed the researcher to report the data using the voice of the participant as illustrated through verbatim quotations and direct reporting strategies that provided details and description to the reader for their own personal interpretation (Creswell, 2013). In this regard, qualitative studies, including this one, involve the reader in the interpretation of the data by allowing the reader to make their own meanings as they read the thick descriptions provided.

The exploration of the lived experiences of special education teachers providing supports in an inclusive environment in elementary schools was most appropriately explored through a qualitative lens. The goal of this study was to understand the perceived roles and responsibilities of special education teachers based on their experiences and informed by their own perceptions. A qualitative approach to this study allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding through gathering and reporting detailed, thick descriptions that could not have been accomplished through quantitative approaches.

Furthermore, consistent with the assertions by Brantlinger and colleagues (2005), this study employed a qualitative design because of its ability to inform the field of special education about policies and practices while concomitantly providing critical information that directly impacted students with disabilities, their families, and their educators. Further, a qualitative approach was selected because it “can enhance awareness of challenges that might be encountered when implementing a new approach and provide insights into contextual variables that influence its effectiveness” (Moore, Klingner, & Harry, 2013, p. 658). The research questions in this study were best aligned with a qualitative approach, and the research questions dictated the research design (Gall et al., 2007). Creswell (2013) asserted that a phenomenological approach is best suited for research in which it is important to gain the understanding of the shared experiences of several individuals to “develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 81). Understanding the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher was necessary not only for the development of policies and procedures for providing supports in inclusive settings, but to also inform teacher education preparation. A phenomenological analysis

informed the field about the knowledge and skills required of special educators so teacher preparation programs could be directly aligned to address each of these areas.

Additionally, a phenomenological study was appropriate because there were broader philosophical assumptions identified in the study (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher identified philosophical assumptions about the role and responsibilities of the special education teacher within inclusive settings and identified how those roles and responsibilities were influenced by the conceptual framework (i.e., Welner's Zone of Mediation). Prior to conducting quantitative studies to improve instructional strategies employed by special education teachers, it was necessary to determine *what* special education teachers needed to know and be able to do.

Instrumentation and Qualitative Research Protocols

Human Research Procedure

The research design for this study was informed using procedures offered for implementing a phenomenological study by experts in the field including, but not limited to, the procedures proposed by Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994). The approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida was obtained prior to beginning the study (see Appendix A). Minimal risks to students, participants, and schools existed in this study and informed consent was attained from the special education teacher participants (see Appendix B). Participants were informed their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The confidentiality of participants, students, and of data was protected through multiple means consistent with the procedures described by Gall and colleagues (2007) and accepted by the UCF IRB office. Access to data was limited using password protections for digital data and locks on cabinets for hard copies of any data (e.g., Demographic Survey). Each participant and participant file was assigned an alphanumeric code that was used in lieu of identifying information such as names. Further, names of individuals, schools, or other identifying data were not collected or used in this study and will not be used in any publication(s). Data will be disposed of after the prescribed amount of time.

A transcription service was used to transcribe participant interviews; however, participants' identities were kept confidential through multiple means. Video recordings of the participants sent to the transcription company did not include names of the participants, school districts, schools of employment, student data, or other identifying information. Further, prior to video recording the interview, participants were instructed to omit names of colleagues, administrators, schools, students, or other identifying data during their responses. Participant video recordings sent to the transcription service were numbered using the assigned number from the camera used in recordings (e.g., MVI_0024.mp4) and, therefore, did not include any identifiers. The transcription company securely stores the uploaded files using a 128-bit SSL encryption, which is the highest level of security available. Each employee of the transcription service is thoroughly vetted and has signed confidentiality agreements ensuring safekeeping of any uploaded files.

Bracketing

Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher participated in the bracketing process. Bracketing is a process that emerged at the same time as phenomenology itself (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and has been viewed by many researchers as an integral part of a phenomenological study design (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing has been defined as a process of deliberately “putting aside one’s own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation” (Chan et al., 2013, p. 1). The bracketing process is an important aspect of the validation of study results in a phenomenology study. Bracketing requires the researcher to identify and report their personal experiences, cultural factors, vested interests, biases, and assumptions all of which could unfairly influence their approach to the study and to the interpretation of data collected (Creswell, 2013; Chan et al., 2013; Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

The importance of bracketing is tied directly to the fact that in a qualitative study, the researcher *is* the instrument for data collection and data analysis (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2013). This role can be subjective (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), and this subjectivity can have an impact on the data analyses processes (Chenail, 2011). Since the researcher plays such an intricate and subjective role in the research process, the researcher’s preconceptions can influence multiple facets of the data from collection to analysis and interpretation (Tufford & Newman, 2010). To reduce the potential influence of the researcher’s preconceptions and increase the rigor of the study, a process known as bracketing was conducted.

Through honest reflection (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), the bracketing process allowed the researcher to discover personal assumptions, examine personal perspectives, and participate in an ongoing reflective process throughout the research study (Fischer, 2009). In this way, bracketing was not a one-time checklist. To the contrary, bracketing was an ongoing process that began at the inception of the research study and continued throughout (Fischer, 2009). Bracketing involved the researcher identifying and exposing their personal assumptions by providing the reader with an understanding for the researcher's perspective which can open readers to new perspectives (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010) and allowed the reader to understand the researcher's positions (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Several procedures were used in the bracketing process in this study, as it is a multi-layered process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Bracketing procedures in this study included a statement of positionality, bracketing interview, audit trail, and a peer-debriefer (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Tufford & Newman, 2010). The positionality statement was written at the start of the study and included in the proposal for the study. The positionality statement was a statement of the researcher's educational and professional background with respect to the phenomenon of this study. The statement provided the reader with an understanding of the researcher's perspective of the construct and allowed the reader to learn the lens through which the researcher has experienced the phenomenon and to draw their own conclusions about the similarities and differences between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013; Wareing, 2011).

The bracketing interview was conducted prior to data collection by a colleague of the researcher. The interviewer was a graduate student at the same university as the researcher

and is pursuing a Doctorate in Philosophy in the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) track. The interviewer was selected because he did not serve in a managerial or clinical position over the researcher (Rolls & Relf, 2006; Tufford & Newman, 2010) and understood the qualitative research process. The bracketing interview included questions about the researcher, educational and professional background, and experiences with the phenomenon. The bracketing interview is included as Appendix C.

The researcher kept an audit trail (Hycner, 1985) which included (in digital format): (a) the original video recordings of the interviews; (b) verbatim transcriptions of the interviews in Word format; and (c) Microsoft Excel data files with selected participant verbatim statements, researcher interpretation of each statement, and identified meanings of the statements. This audit trail allowed the researcher to reference the video recordings throughout the data analysis process, analyze and report verbatim statements made by the participants, and keep detailed records of emerging meanings and themes.

As a final component of the bracketing process, a peer-debriefer (Hycner, 1985) was used to participate in the data analysis process to provide reliability the researcher's findings related to assigned meanings and identified themes (Hycner, 1985). The peer-debriefer was a doctoral student pursuing a Doctorate in Philosophy degree in the Exceptional Student Education at the same university as the researcher. The peer-debriefer was not the same person who conducted the bracketing interview. The peer-debriefer was selected because of her knowledge of qualitative researcher methodology and her expertise in exceptional student education policies, procedures, and practices. The peer-debriefer was provided digital copies of the transcripts for each participant and the Excel data analysis files. Detailed instructions

were provided to the peer-debriefer to conduct inter-coder reliability (see Appendix D). For each participant, the peer-debriefer stated their agreement or disagreement with the assigned unit of relevant meaning and related theme. In the event there was a disagreement between the researcher and peer-debriefer, the disagreement was reconciled and noted the reasoning for the disagreement and the specifics of the reconciliation.

The timing of the bracketing process warrants consideration. Debate arises from the appropriate time to engage in the bracketing procedures (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Some researchers recommend postponing the bracketing processes until data analysis has commenced (Giorgi, 1997); while others recommend the bracketing process begin before data collection (e.g., Chan et al, 2013). Hycner (1985) suggested the process be ongoing so researchers are continually reflecting on their preconceptions as they move throughout the research process. By employing three means of bracketing (e.g., bracketing interview, audit trail, peer-debriefer) in this study, the researcher engaged in an ongoing bracketing process (Hycner, 1985). The positionality statement was conducted prior to beginning the study. The bracketing interview was conducted prior to data collection. The audit trail was a continuous process that extended through the duration of the study. The peer-debriefer was used after data were collected. These methods allowed the researcher to identify preconceptions at the throughout the research process which may have influenced the study findings.

Participant Sampling & Recruitment

This study used purposive, criterion sampling and snowball sampling methods (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Kuzell, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select participants ($N = 7$) employed in elementary schools located in the southeast United States. The seven participants were employed in six different districts and included schools in rural, urban, and suburban settings serving diverse populations of students with varied academic and behavioral needs. A purposive, criterion sampling method allowed the researcher to provide individual accounts of experiences with the phenomenon that emulated the issues of central importance (Patton, 1990). Additionally, purposive sampling increased the “range of data exposed and maximize[d] the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 82).

Sampling procedures in this study were guided by the richness of information the participants were able to provide (Kuzel, 1992; O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). The number of participants in this study was dependent on the data collected and on data saturation. Sampling in a qualitative study is concerned “less on sample size and more on sample adequacy” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012, p. 13). This is not to say that sample size was not important, because sample size was important and affects generalizability and transferability of the results (Onwuegbuzie, 2003; O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). Therefore, the sample size was large enough to answer the questions, but not so large that that it caused unnecessary repetition of the data (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Participants included in this study had direct experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The success of a phenomenological study resides in the ability of the

research questions to “tap the subjects’ experiences of the phenomenon as distinct from their theoretical knowledge of it” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 58). Participants who “have had experience relating to the phenomenon” (Kruger, 1988, p. 150) were selected to participate in this study. Participants were selected because of their experiences with the phenomenon to provide data that answered the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Slavin, 2007) and were identified through a collaborative process with school district personnel. Participants who met the criteria were identified by school leaders (Bailey, 1996; Holloway, 1997) or were recommended through snowball sampling (Babie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Snowball sampling identified additional, potential participants or other specific individuals by school district personnel or selected interviewees who met the selection criteria (Gall et al., 2007; Patton 2002; 2015). The sampling technique was used until saturation was reached.

Participant Criteria

Criteria met by special education teacher participants included: (a) state certification in Exceptional Student Education (K-12); (b) employment at the school site; (c) minimum of two years teaching experience; and (d) teaching responsibilities (including direct instruction and/or student support in the general education classroom). In single subject studies (Gast, 2010; Horner et al., 2005) and other experimental study designs (Gall et al., 2007), strict criteria for participants is typically required to ensure subjects are as similar as possible to limit extraneous variables and thereby reduce the likelihood of internal threats. However, in a phenomenological study design, criteria for participants should include stipulations for creating a cadre of participants that are similar (e.g., special education teachers, elementary

teachers), but not be so limiting that they affect the data collected (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

According to Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994), participants in a phenomenological study should have shared experiences of the phenomena. There are two elements for establishing participant criteria in a phenomenological study, “‘what’ the individuals have experienced and ‘how’ they have experienced it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). Additionally, Creswell (2013) stated, “the inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (p. 76). Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated the sampling for a phenomenological study was to include “those who have experienced the phenomena of interest” (p. 1373). Further, Starks and Trinidad (2007) emphasized the importance of not establishing too strict a criterion for participants since it is “through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features or essences of an experience or event” and that the “purpose sampling methods are used to recruit participants who have experienced the phenomena under study” (p. 1374). By gaining the perspective of multiple participants who have experienced the phenomena, data could lead to shared themes across participants.

Participant Demographics

Seven participants ($N = 7$) were included in this study and represented six school districts within one Southeastern state. All participants identified as white females and ranged in age from 26 to 62 years, with the average age of 41. The average number of years

of teaching experience was 11, with a range from 4 to 20 years. Most participants were certified special education teachers for the duration of their careers, one teacher taught seven of 16 years in special education. This participant taught general education for her first nine years in the classroom. Four participants received their initial teaching degrees in a different state than the one in this study. Three of the participants earned their teaching degrees in the state of the study. All participants except one, were dual certified in Exceptional Student Education K-12 and either Elementary Education K-6 or PK-3. Four participants had an English as a Second Language (ESOL) K-12 Endorsement, and one had a Reading Endorsement. Only one participant was single-certified and their certification was as a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) K-12 teacher. At the time of the interviews, four participants were in their final semester of their Master's program; two had begun earning credits towards their Master's degree; and one was in the process of applying for her Master's. All participants were enrolled (or applied) to the same university. Participant demographics are presented in Table 8.

Table 8:

Participant Demographic Data

P	Position Title	Years Taught in Special Education	Grade Levels Taught	Subject Areas Taught	Certification Areas	Teaching Degree	Highest Level of Education	Age	Race	Gender
1	ESE Teacher K-5	20	K-12	Reading, Math, Writing, Hospital/ Homebound K- 12, Medically Fragile	SLD K-12, Social Science 6-12, ESOL, Elementary K-6	Florida Southern College	Master's	62	W	F
2	Support Facilitator	16	K-12	All Elementary, LA 6-8, Science 6-8, Social Studies 6-8, 9-12 ESE (Variety)	Elementary K-6, ESE, ESOL	New Hampshire University	Master's	40	W	F
3	Support Facilitator	16	K-5	All Elementary	SLD K-12	UCF	Master's	50	W	F
4	Inclusion Teacher, Communication and Social Skills Teacher	4	PK-5	All Elementary, Developmentally Delayed VPK, Communication/ Social Skills K-1 Self-Contained	PK-3, ESE	Westminster College (PA)	18 Credit Hours towards Master's	26	W	F
5	ESE Teacher K-5	4	K-5	All Elementary	Elementary K-6, ESE, ESOL, Reading	UCF	6 CH towards Master's	28	W	F

P	Position Title	Years Taught in Special Education	Grade Levels Taught	Subject Areas Taught	Certification Areas	Teaching Degree	Highest Level of Education	Age	Race	Gender
6	Support Facilitation and Resource	4	K-5	All Elementary, Social Skills, Independent Functioning	Elementary K-6, ESE	Eastern Kentucky University	Bachelor's	44	W	F
7	VE Inclusion Teacher	7	K-5	All Elementary	PK-3, ESE, ESOL	Arkansas State University	Master's	40	W	F

Researcher's Role

The researcher served as the main instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013). Within that role, the researcher gained acceptance by the participants, but remained removed enough to be objective. The researcher stated positionality at the beginning of the study and participated in a bracketing interview (Creswell, 2013; Slavin, 2007) prior to beginning data collection (see Bracketing in Chapter 3 for specific procedures). The researcher showed reciprocity (Harrison et al., 2001) and reflexivity (Barry et al., 1999). At the conclusion of the study, the researcher ensured closure and the relationships ended harmoniously (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

In accordance with phenomenological studies, this study gathered data from semi-structured interviews (Hycner, 1985; Spradley, 1980) with participants ($N = 7$) who had direct knowledge and experience with the phenomenon explored (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Prior to the interview, a Demographic Survey (see Appendix E) was provided to and completed by each participant. The Demographic Survey included 14 questions related to the participants': (a) current employment status (e.g., position title, classification, areas of certification); (b) teaching experience (e.g., number of years teaching, subject(s) and grade level(s) taught); (c) education (e.g., where they received their teaching degree, highest level of education); and (d) personal information (gender, race, age).

Interview Process

Each participant in this study participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher (Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003). Participants also engaged in a “validity check” (Hycner, 1985, p. 291). The “validity check” provided the participant the opportunity to review the verbatim transcription of their interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000) once all interviews were transcribed. The “validity check” process included two important steps: (a) determining if the participant agreed with the transcription and if the content of the transcripts captured their experience accurately, and (b) elicit clarifications or additional information. According to Creswell & Miller (2000), providing the participants with copies of the verbatim transcriptions of the interview allowed them to “confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127).

Interviews began December 18, 2016 and concluded January 28, 2017. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a mutually agreed upon public location (e.g., restaurant, university, or other location closest to the participant’s work or home for convenience). No interviews were conducted on public school property to ensure the comfort and confidentiality of the participant and to ensure compliance with IRB requirements. Interviews were scheduled at the participant’s request and at the time and day of the week most convenient for individual schedules. Because interviews occurred at the time most convenient for the participant, the time and day of the week ranged including morning, afternoon, and evening. Some interviews were conducted on weekends; however, the majority took place on a weekday evening. The length of each interview varied and was dependent on the length of the participant’s responses to interview questions. Interviews

ranged in length from 25 minutes to 67 minutes, with the average interview length of 39 minutes.

All interviews were video-recorded with the permission of the participants (Slavin, 2007) using a digital camera. Recordings were downloaded to the researcher's computer and were sent digitally through a secure website to a transcription service to be transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2013; Poland, 1995). The transcriptions were returned to the researcher from the transcription company via email. The transcriptions captured non-verbal communication including laughter, pauses, repeated words, and filler words. Upon receipt of the typed, verbatim transcriptions, the researcher reviewed each transcript for accuracy. The process of ensuring accuracy involved the researcher watching the video recording of the participant while simultaneously reading the digital transcript line-by-line making corrections, if warranted. Minimal corrections were necessary and were related to phonetic inconsistencies (e.g., "job chairing" versus "job sharing"). After the researcher made corrections as warranted, participants were provided with their original interview transcripts to review as part of the validity checking process. Original transcripts were sent to participants via email. See Appendix G for email template sent to participants.

Data collection was continuous and informed the researcher of the need to conduct more interviews with additional participants. All data collected enabled the researcher to answer the research question. High-quality digital recordings were used for video recording. Predetermined interview protocols were used (Creswell, 2013).

Interview Questions

The interview questions in this study were developed to capture lived experiences of the participants. Interview questions were designed to both elicit in-depth responses from the participants, as well as build rapport between the researcher and participant (Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended questions were asked to allow the participant to answer questions in detail. The researcher used semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher to establish interview questions that could answer the research questions while remaining flexible enough to allow the researcher to ask probing and clarifying questions. A semi-structured format was responsive to the participant and allowed the data to guide the process (Creswell, 2013).

Interview questions in this study are presented in Table 9.

Table 9:

Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers

Data Type	Interview Questions	Probing Questions
Participant's Professional Experiences, Training, & Development	1. Tell me about yourself and your teaching experiences.	
Overarching Description of Teaching Roles and Responsibilities	1. Describe your average workday.	1. Describe the daily expectations your supervisor has for you. 2. Describe your communication with other professionals regarding student needs and outcomes.
Tiered Service Delivery	1. Describe how you provide specially-designed instruction and intervention to students 2. Discuss the implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) at your school. 3. Describe your role and responsibilities related to MTSS. 4. Have you seen changes in your role and responsibilities as a special educator since you started teaching?	1. How do you modify instruction or intervention to meet student needs? 2. Describe some of those changes. 3. Describe these changes in the services you provide to students both with and without disabilities.
Conclusion	1. Is there anything else about your current roles and responsibilities as a special education teacher that I haven't asked you that you would like to share?	

Data Analysis

Demographic Data

Each participant completed a Demographic Survey (see Appendix E). The Demographic Survey included 14 questions related to the participants': (a) current employment status (e.g., position title, classification, areas of certification); (b) teaching experience (e.g., number of years teaching, subject(s) and grade level(s) taught); (c) education (e.g., where they received their teaching degree, highest level of education); (d) current levels of support (e.g., how many students on their caseload); and (e) personal information (gender, race, age). Participants completed the Demographic Survey by paper and pencil. The researcher entered the data collected in an Excel spreadsheet. Using various Excel functions, the researcher calculated the range and mean for the participant's age, number of years teaching, number of years teaching special education, and the number of students on each participant's caseload identified as having a disability or who are considered at-risk. Additionally, nominal data collected in the Demographic Survey were reported. The original Demographic Survey did not include a question about the number of general education teachers or the number of general education classrooms the participant was responsible for supporting. This question was added after data emerged highlighting its significance. The range and mean for each of these two added questions were also calculated.

Interviews

The data analysis procedures for analyzing the interview data were guided by Colaizzi (1978) who offered a seven-step process. The seven-step process was established by Sanders (2003) as a guideline for researchers conducting a phenomenological study. This process is presented in Table 10.

Table 10:

Guidelines for Interview Data Analysis

Guideline	Description
1 <i>Obtaining the Experiences of Each Participant's Transcript</i>	The audio/video recordings and transcripts will be listened to and read/reviewed multiple times to gain an understanding of the participant's feelings and ideas. The participant will be involved in this stage of analysis by reviewing their transcript to verify their experiences. The participants can add comments or make clarifications to ensure that the transcript "accurately represented what was said during the interview and was true to their experience" (Sanders, 2003, p. 295).
2 <i>Selecting Significant Statements or Phrases</i>	Specific statements or phrases will be selected from the transcripts that provide the broad meaning and that captures the participant's story of their lived experiences.
3 <i>Describing Components of Meaning</i>	The transcripts and recordings will be read and listened to multiple times to gain context for themes that may emerge. Researcher will review every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and non-verbal notation to elicit participant meaning paying attention to literal meaning. Researcher will address the research questions in relation to the general meaning. In this phase, the researcher extracts the data that directly answers the research questions and notes statements that are irrelevant.
4 <i>Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning</i>	Common threads of meaning will be clustered together and categories of relevant meaning will be united. The clusters of meaning will be used to find central themes that exemplify and define the essence of the clusters.
5 <i>Describing the Phenomenon</i>	This step in the process requires the researcher to use the relevant meanings to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena under investigation.
6 <i>Describing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978)</i>	The comprehensive description of the phenomena will be reduced to an essential structure.
7 <i>Member-Checking</i>	The researcher will return to the participant to conduct a "validity check" (Hycner, 1985, p. 291). During this step, the researcher will have the participant review the verbatim transcripts of the interview to illicit clarification and provide the participant with an opportunity to provide feedback on their accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

To facilitate the data analysis process and ensure that each step in the seven-step process was followed, an Excel spreadsheet was created for each participant. Each Excel file included six distinct columns. The first four columns aligned with steps two through five of the data analysis procedures as outlined by Colaizzi (1978). The fifth column was used for feedback from the peer-debriefer. The sixth column was used by the researcher to reconcile any disagreements in findings by the peer-debriefer (if applicable). Specifically, the six columns included: (a) Significant Statements (made by the participant); (b) Description of the Components of Meaning; (c) Organization of the Units of Meaning; (d) Description of the Phenomenon (Themes); (e) peer-debriefer comments; and (f) reconciliation of peer-debriefer comments (if applicable).

Although not included in the Excel spreadsheet, the first step in the data analysis procedure requires the researcher to read the transcript and watch the corresponding video recording of each interview simultaneously and multiple times. This process allowed the researcher to get a sense of the “whole” before breaking the data into parts (Creswell, 2013). After watching the video recordings and reading the transcripts, the researcher selected significant statements and placed them in the first column of the Excel spreadsheet (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Carspecken, 1996; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Fetterman, 2010; Poland, 1995). Significant statements were copied verbatim from the transcript. This step corresponded with Colaizzi’s (1978) Step Two. Each statement was entered in a separate cell. By including the significant statement verbatim, the researcher preserved the integrity of the statement, captured the lived experience from the participant’s perspective, aided in the reporting of data, and assisted the peer-debriefer in their role. Further, verbatim statements allowed the researcher

to present the data in a factual manner using detail and extensive quotes from participants (Slavin, 2007).

Once all significant statements were identified and placed in Column A, the researcher reviewed each statement and described its component of meaning. This step corresponded with Colaizzi's (1978) Step 3. The description was written in the corresponding cell in Column B. To obtain and describe the meaning, the researcher paid attention to the words, phrases, and sentences used by the participant to illustrate their lived experience. Descriptions of meaning were provided for each significant statement before the moving on to the next step. To complete Colaizzi's (1978) Step 4, *Organizing Units of Meaning*, the researcher re-read and reviewed the significant statement and description of its meaning. The researcher then categorized and reduced the statements and their descriptions into *clusters* of meaning. The description of the unit (cluster) of meaning was written in Column C. For Colaizzi's (1978) Step 5 of the process, the researcher used the relevant meanings reported in Column C to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena and reported that description in Column D. Essentially, the researcher provided a narrowed description the phenomenon by assigning a theme to relevant meaning in this step (see Appendix F).

The first five steps were repeated for each participant. Upon completion of the first five steps for all participants, the researcher emailed each Excel file to the peer-debriefer. The peer-debriefer was provided with detailed instructions on the type of feedback and the role in the process (see Appendix D). To complete the task, the peer-debriefer was provided with the original transcript and data analysis Excel file for each participant. Even though Column A included the verbatim, significant statement made by the participant, the researcher sent the original transcript for the peer-debriefer's reference in the event the peer-debriefer needed to

review the statement within the context in which it was made. For each statement, the peer-debriefer noted their agreement or disagreement in Column E for the assigned descriptions, meanings, and themes. If the peer-debriefer disagreed with the researcher, the peer-debriefer provided an explanation of the disagreement. Once feedback was received from the peer-debriefer, the researcher reviewed the comments. The explanation in Column E from the peer-debriefer was used by the researcher in the reconciliation process. In the event of disagreements, the reconciliation through a consensus process and the outcome was included in Column F. All statements were reconciled prior to moving on to Colaizzi's (1978) Step 6.

Colaizzi's (1978) Step 6 required the researcher to reduce the comprehensive themes (Column D, Colaizzi Step 5) into an essential structure. To complete this step, the researcher created another Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet included several tabs. The first tab, Sheet 1, was labeled *Units of Relevant Meaning*. Every unit of meaning, Colaizzi Step 4, from each participant was included in this sheet and then alphabetized. The second tab, Sheet 2, was labeled *Themes*. Every theme (Colaizzi Step 5) that appeared in participant data analysis files was included in Column A of Sheet 2, *Themes*. Related items from Column A were grouped together, condensed, and a reduced theme was provided in Column B. These "overarching" themes were then placed in Sheet 3, labeled *Overarching Themes*. These themes were then categorized into broader themes and tertiary themes and placed in Sheet 4. Essentially, Sheet 4 was a reorganization of the same information included in Sheet 3. This step narrowed the Themes to four broad categories, with multiple tertiary themes included in each broader theme. This new spreadsheet was emailed to the peer-debriefer for feedback. Additionally, the researcher met with Dr. David Boote, whose expertise is in Qualitative Methodology. Dr. Boote is an Associate Professor of Curriculum Studies in the College of Education and Human

Performance at the University of Central Florida and is a member of the Dissertation Committee for this study. The purpose of this meeting was to receive his expert feedback and guidance, as well as serve as part of the establishment of the trustworthiness of the data findings. After feedback was received from both the peer-debriefer and Dr. Boote, the researcher reviewed all themes with the Dissertation Committee Chair, Dr. Mary Little, to elicit guidance and feedback.

The final step of Colaizzi's (1978) process included Member Checking procedures. Member checking is a process used to ensure reliability of data (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The member checking process in this study was informed using Creswell and Miller's (2000) "validity checking" procedure. After interviews were transcribed by the transcription service, all participants received digital copies of their verbatim transcripts via email and were asked to confirm the transcript for accuracy. Further, participants were encouraged to make additions or edits as they wished (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Data collection and analysis are unique in qualitative studies in that the researcher acts as the instrument for analysis. This process requires the researcher to make "judgments about coding, categorizing, de-contextualizing, and re-contextualizing the data" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376). As such, multiple steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. In a phenomenological study, ensuring the trustworthiness of the data begins with the bracketing process in which the researcher sets aside their assumptions and pre-existing biases of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; van Manen, 1997). For detailed information about the bracketing process, see the bracketing section of Chapter 3.

Additionally, this study used triangulation. The units of meaning and themes that emerged from this study occurred across participants and were not unique to one participant (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2002; Patton, 2015). Descriptions of participants' lived experiences were reported using verbatim statements and phrases made by each participant during interviews. These descriptions provided the reader with the ability to draw individual conclusions about the data collected. Triangulation of data was also conducted with a peer-debriefer and consultation with a faculty supervisor. Using this process of triangulation is referred to as *investigator triangulation* (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) in which multiple perspectives are sought to review the data findings. The use of a peer-debriefer was not only essential for the bracketing process, but also served to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. An external audit was conducted (Hycner, 1985) utilizing a peer-debriefer (trained colleague of the researcher) who independently verified the findings. The peer-debriefer was not involved in the data collection process. The colleague reviewed the data and provided feedback on the analyses of the data. In addition, the researcher gained the assistance of Dr. Boote in the data review process, which allowed for the validation and confirmation of the study findings and themes (Carter et al., 2014). By consulting with outsiders, the researcher gained different perspectives on the data collected (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Carter et al., 2014).

Finally, consultation was conducted with each participant during the process of member-checking (Creswell, 2013) utilizing Creswell and Miller's (2000) "validity checking" process. By engaging in validity checking, the researcher was able to clear misconceptions, clarify responses and interpretations, and add additional information as warranted to ensure that the transcriptions accurately reflected the participants' beliefs (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Hycner, 1985). Validity checking was completed by providing each participant with a copy of the

original, verbatim transcript via email (see Appendix G). This allowed the participant to add meaning to or clarify meaning of (Creswell & Miller, 2000) to their own transcripts.

Researcher Positionality

Bracketing procedures in this study included a detailed statement of positionality (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Tufford & Newman, 2010). As previously stated, the positionality statement was written at the beginning of the study. Included in the following positionality statement is the researcher's educational and professional background with respect to the phenomenon of this study. The following statement provides the reader with information about the researcher's perspective of the construct (Creswell, 2013, Wareing, 2011).

Positionality Statement

I am a former intensive reading teacher at a suburban middle school in a large southeast state. While employed by the school district, I actively served on the MTSS committee, Literacy Committee, and collaborated with special education teachers and paraprofessionals. As an intensive reading teacher, all my students were considered to be in Tier 2 of MTSS and therefore received an additional 45 minutes of intensive reading instruction daily. Placement in the intensive reading course was data-driven as all students were determined to be below proficiency in reading comprehension as measured by the high-stakes state exam.

I am currently a doctoral candidate at the second largest university in the nation and have focused my research on students with learning disabilities, MTSS, inclusive practices, and teacher preparation in special education. I completed my Master's in Exceptional Student Education at the same university. As part of my doctoral program, I serve as a Project Assistant on a federally-funded grant through the Office of Special Education Preparation (OSEP) for

teacher preparation with a focus on preparing special education teachers at the Master's level in Intensive Interventions for students with severe and persistent instructional needs. Additionally, I serve as Project Assistant on a federally-funded OSEP grant on the preparation of doctoral level administrators in educational leadership with a focus on special education preparation.

I believe that the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher are evolving and require skills, knowledge, and competencies that are inclusive, data-driven, and collaborative. Further, I believe that there is a need to redefine the special education teacher's role especially within the MTSS framework as special education teachers are no longer only responsible for instruction and intervention for students already identified as having a disability. It is my belief that the reach of the special education teacher has been extended into the general education classroom and has implications for students with and without disabilities who may need additional supports to meet grade level standards.

I am responsible for the development of this research study including conducting the literature review, identifying the gap in literature, formulating the research questions, developing the interview questions and protocols, and data collection and analysis procedures. I conducted this research study to identify the roles and responsibilities unique to the special education teacher in working in inclusive settings. It could be argued that my past experiences as an educator and current research focus could impact various aspects of this study. However, Brantlinger and colleagues (2005) asserted that for researchers to do qualitative work well, they "must have experience related to [our] research focus, be well read, knowledgeable, analytical, reflective, and introspective" (p. 197). My experiences and knowledge in MTSS, special education preparation, and literacy provided me with each of these qualities. Identification of

these roles and responsibilities is critical for policy and procedure as well as special education teacher preparation and professional development.

Summary

This chapter provided the research methodology that guided this research study. In addition to providing the rationale for the study design, this chapter outlined the procedures and protocols relating to data collection and analysis for this phenomenological study. This chapter also presented the researcher's bracketing procedures as well as positionality for the reader's understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings of the phenomenological study, which explored the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided supports to students in the general education classroom. The central phenomenon of this study was the evolving roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to be effective in their practice. Five themes of the phenomenon were identified from analyses of the data. The five central themes uncovered in this study included: (a) supporting students with disabilities within a support facilitation model; (b) role ambiguity of the special education teacher; (c) the lack of roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS framework; (d) the changing role of collaboration and communication; and (e) the challenges impacting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Twenty-five tertiary themes emerged within each of the five themes and each tertiary theme is presented.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who provide supports for students in inclusive settings in elementary schools?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with providing supports in inclusive settings?

This chapter is organized in two sections, beginning with biosketches of each participant. These biosketches provide the reader with the background of each of the seven participants and are important for understanding the data collected. The next section presents the data analysis

results. This section is further organized by theme and subdivided by tertiary theme. To answer the first research question, each theme is supported by detailed, thick, rich description using the words, phrases, and statements of participants. To respond to the second question, the meanings of these experiences are provided through verbatim descriptions and implied meanings.

Participant Biosketches

Participant biosketches are offered to provide the reader with a detailed background of each of the seven participants who took part in this study. Participant backgrounds were also provided in Table 8, Chapter 3. The biosketches include additional information not provided in Table 8.

Patty

Patty was a 62-year-old Caucasian woman and was an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher for over 20 years. Patty received her undergraduate degree in education from a college in the same state as this study and earned her Master's in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) five months after participating in an interview for this study. When Patty began teaching, she worked in a resource setting to provide supports and services to students with disabilities. Her teaching experiences ranged across the continuum of services and included hospital and homebound settings, self-contained classrooms, and the general education classroom. Further, Patty supported students across the content areas in all grade levels from Kindergarten through 12th grade. At the time of this study, Patty was employed one of the 10 largest, urban school districts in the nation. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 200,667 (FLDOE, 2017).

Jasmine

Jasmine was 40-year-old Caucasian woman who taught for 16 years. Jasmine received her undergraduate degree in education from a college in the Northeastern region of the United States. Jasmine earned her Master's degree in ESE five months after participating in an interview for this study. She began teaching at the high school level and her first teaching experiences were in a self-contained, intensive needs classroom, where she taught life skills, cooking classes, and other fundamental learning skills. Jasmine's experiences as an ESE teacher have included self-contained, resource, and general education settings. Jasmine had experience working with students with disabilities, including Intellectual Disabilities (InD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). She also was the primary content teacher for students with disabilities in several content areas (e.g., social studies, language arts, science) across grade levels (K-12). At the time of this study, Jasmine was employed at a charter school and was assigned to one grade level and provided academic and behavioral supports to students with disabilities. Her teaching responsibilities at her school of employment varied from other participants' schools. This difference can be attributed to the assignment of a dedicated ESE teacher at each grade level at Jasmine's school. Additionally, all students with disabilities at this school were assigned to one classroom per grade level; however, not all students in the classroom had a disability. Jasmine was assigned to support fifth grade. At the time of this study, Jasmine was employed in a mixed rural and suburban district. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 42,516 (FLDOE, 2017).

Kayla

Kayla was a 50-year-old Caucasian woman who taught students with disabilities for 16 years. Kayla received her undergraduate degree in education at a university in the same state as

this study. Kayla earned her Master's degree in ESE five months after participating in an interview for this study. When Kayla began her teaching career, she worked in a self-contained classroom with eight students with Varying Exceptionalities (VE). At the time, Kayla had the support of two paraprofessionals in her classroom to meet student needs. Kayla worked as a support facilitator for last 10 years, and was at two different schools in that capacity. At the time of this study, Kayla was employed in a mixed rural and suburban district. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 63,100 (FLDOE, 2017).

Justine

Justine was a 26-year-old Caucasian woman who taught students with disabilities for four years. Justine received her teaching degree from a state in the Northeastern region of the country. She is currently working towards her Master's degree in ESE. Justine taught a self-contained preschool class for students with Autism or with language or social skills disorders. At the time of this study, Justine was a support facilitator and a Communication and Social Skills teacher. All students on her caseload had Autism and required social skills training (as indicated on their IEPs). At the time of this study, Justine was employed in a mixed urban and suburban district. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 129,436 (FLDOE, 2017).

Amanda

Amanda was a 28-year-old Caucasian woman who taught students with disabilities for four years. Amanda received her undergraduate degree in education from a university in the same state as this study. She is currently working towards her Master's degree in ESE. All of Amanda's work experiences have been in inclusive settings as a support facilitator including

during her internship for her undergraduate degree. At the time of this study, Amanda was employed in a suburban district. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 67,816 (FLDOE, 2017).

Rayna

Rayna was a 44-year-old Caucasian woman who taught special education for four years. Rayna received her undergraduate degree in a different field from a university in the Midwest. Rayna received her certification through an alternate certification program. Rayna's preparation was least typical from the other participants, but overall findings were not affected by this difference. At the time of the interview, Rayna applied to a Master's in ESE program. Prior to conclusion of the study, Rayna was accepted to the Master's program, but had not yet begun her studies. Rayna's first year in the classroom was in a self-contained setting for students with disabilities, including SLD or Emotional Behavior Disabilities (EBD) in grades three through five. Rayna previously worked in a resource setting and as a support facilitation teacher in the general education classroom. At the time of this study, Rayna was employed one of the 10 largest, urban school districts in the nation. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 200,667 (FLDOE, 2017).

Emily

Emily was a 40-year-old Caucasian woman who taught for 16 years, seven of which have been in special education. She earned her Master's degree in ESE four months after participating in an interview for this study. Emily had three adopted siblings who came into her family with special needs and required extra supports to access the general education curriculum. Emily stated that these personal experiences led her to become a teacher and eventually a special

education teacher. Emily's teaching experiences began in an inclusive first grade general education classroom. After working with a support facilitator, she decided to become a special education teacher. Her first experiences as a special education teacher were in a self-contained classroom for students in preschool through third grade. She transitioned to a resource setting and later to providing supports in a general education classroom. At the time of this study, Emily was employed in a small rural district. Student enrollment in this district for the 2016-2017 school year was 43,040 (FLDOE, 2017).

Data Analysis Results

Participant interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to 67 minutes, with the average interview length of 39 minutes. Across all seven participants, 4 hours and 33 minutes of interview data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, resulting in 1,318 significant statements. Initially, 154 Units of Relevant Meaning (Colaizzi Step 4) were identified with 69 corresponding Descriptions of the Phenomenon (Colaizzi Step 5). These descriptions were then collapsed into 25 tertiary themes. Based on the 25 tertiary themes identified in this study, 5 main themes were constructed through a Description of the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon (Colaizzi Step 6). The five themes included: (a) supporting students with disabilities within a support facilitation model; (b) role ambiguity of the special education teacher; (c) the lack of roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS framework; (d) the changing role of collaboration and communication; and (e) the challenges impacting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Thematic data that emerged from this study were represented using a variation of the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method offered by Hill, Thompson, and Williams

(1997). The CQR method allowed for the representation of more complicated phenomenon such as the one explored in this study and allowed the researcher to note the prevalence of each tertiary theme within the sample of participants in this study (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, & Hess, 2005; Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006). Each experience of the phenomenon, or tertiary theme, was categorized as typical, frequent, or variant (Nelson et al., 2006). Experiences were categorized as *typical* if mentioned by 6 -7 participants, *frequent* if mentioned by 3-5 participants, or *variant* if mentioned by 1 - 2 participants. The researcher elected to represent the data in this way to allow the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the data across participants but also understand complexities of each participant's lived experience (Nelson et al., 2006).

Table 11:

Frequency of Participant Experiences and Meanings by Themes and Tertiary Themes

Research Question	Theme	Tertiary Theme	Typical	Frequent	Variant
<i>RQ 1</i>	<i>Supporting Students with Disabilities within a Support Facilitation Model</i>	Change in Placement	X		
		Managing Caseloads	X		
		The Time of Each Support Facilitation Session	X		
		Providing Accommodations	X		
		Supporting the General Education Teacher	X		
		Supporting Academic Needs	X		
		Supporting Behavioral Needs		X	
<i>RQ 2</i>	<i>Role Ambiguity of the Special Education Teacher</i>	Loss of Personal Classroom Autonomy	X		
		Increased Paperwork	X		
		Legal Compliance	X		
		Data Collection and Data-Based Decision Making	X		
		No Involvement in Evaluation for Special Education		X	
	<i>The Lack of Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher within the MTSS Framework</i>	No Participation Prior to Special Education Identification	X		
		School-Wide Intervention Protocol		X	
		District Adopted Intervention Protocol		X	
		Computer-Based Intervention Programs		X	
	<i>The Changing Role of Collaboration and Communication</i>	Time for Common Planning	X		
		Communication		X	
		Building Relationships		X	
		Special Education Teachers Felt Valued			X
	<i>The Challenges Impacting the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting</i>	Master Schedule	X		
		Student Skillset		X	
		Concerns about Achieving Grade Level Standards		X	
		Student Mindset		X	
		Ethical Issues			X

Note. Typical = 6-7 Participants; Frequent = 3-5 Participants; Variant = 1-2 Participants

Research Question One

The first research question addressed in this study was, “What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided supports for students in inclusive settings in elementary schools?” The participants in this study stated that they experienced changes in their roles and responsibilities as special education teachers. Data from this study suggested these changes were a result of increased attention and focus on supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible.

Finally, six of the seven participants in this study began their careers in special education supporting students with disabilities in self-contained or resource settings. According to participant data, providing supports in self-contained or resource settings meant that participants had their own classrooms, were responsible for instruction in multiple subject areas across grade levels, and provided specially-designed instruction to support students in small, focused groups. Data collected in this study suggested a new role for participants identified as “support facilitation” that emerged as a service delivery model in the last three to five years. In a support facilitation role, participants taught students in the general education classroom to provide support consistent with IEPs and ensured access to accommodations to facilitate participation in the general education curriculum. Given the recent emergence of a support facilitation service delivery model, participants: (a) became responsible for larger caseloads of students in multiple classrooms with limited time; (b) assisted general education teachers in understanding the importance of making lessons

accessible to a wide range of learning needs; and (c) directly supported students' academic and behavioral needs.

Research Question One: Supporting Data

Theme One: Supporting Students with Disabilities within a Support Facilitation Model

The first theme to emerge across participants was the construct of *support facilitation*. The seven participants in this study were from six different school districts and all participants identified their current instructional role as *support facilitators* or as participating in a *support facilitation model*. Although all participants used the term *support facilitator* during interviews when describing their role, only three participants reported their official position title as *support facilitator* on their Demographic Survey (see Appendix E). According to the Demographic Survey, two of participants were ESE teachers and two were inclusion teachers.

After using the terms, participants were prompted to provide a definition or description for *support facilitator* or *support facilitation*. The first interview question asked participants to describe their educational and professional background. When describing their current roles, participants used the term, *support facilitator*. Support facilitation was described as a role in which the special education teacher provided special education services to students with disabilities in the general education setting for a prescribed amount of time each week, usually during reading or mathematics instructional time. Further, supports and services in this model were provided after initial group instruction by the general education teacher and during independent practice. Students could convene in the back of the general

education classroom for instruction and intervention in small groups. The role of the general education teacher in this model was to be the lead instructor who provided whole group instruction. As the lead instructor, the general education teacher was responsible for the development of the lesson plans, selection of activities, and creation and implementation of assessments.

In describing support facilitation, Kayla provided the following definition,

“Support facilitation is a model where I support my exceptional student education students [sic] with IEPs in the general education setting. So, I take my materials, I take my instruction, and I go to them and I support them in the gen ed classroom”.

Justine further elaborated on the process with the definition,

“Support facilitation is where the ESE teacher is going into the general education classroom, and they are supporting the students. And they are just facilitating that support.”

When asked to define support facilitation, Patty stated,

“Well, what it looks like in our school is, I go into the [general education] classroom to support my student as they receive the general [education] curriculum. They have to be exposed to that, and they’re expected to be successful in that. So, I will go in and...help them to be successful”.

Kayla stressed support facilitation allowed her to provide supports to students that complemented the general education teacher’s initial instruction. She emphasized that her role was not to provide instruction in lieu of the teacher, but instead enhance or reinforce their instruction. Specifically, Kayla stated that “support is *after* the initial instruction has

been given, and then I elaborate or I intensify on what they just taught”. Similarly, Amanda explained, “I’m helping them through- usually by the point I’ve gotten there, the teacher’s done the whole group instruction, so we’re working on independent practice problems”.

Tertiary Themes

The theme *Supporting Students with Disabilities within a Support Facilitation Model* included seven tertiary themes: (a) change in placement; (b) managing caseloads; (c) the time of each support facilitation session; (d) providing accommodations; (e) supporting the general education teacher; (f) supporting academic needs; and (g) supporting behavioral needs.

Tertiary Theme 1: Change in Placement

Participant criteria for this study included that participants had to have “teaching responsibilities” which could include “direct instruction and/or student support” to occur “in the general education classroom”. This stipulation precluded the participation of special education teachers who taught or provided supports to students with disabilities in a self-contained setting or solely in a resource room. Overall, participants described support facilitation as a role in which they provided supports and services consistent with IEPs to students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

The shift in place for service delivery for students resulted in a shift in roles for the special education teacher. Schools that utilized a support facilitation model included students with disabilities in the general education classroom with their peers for most the day. To this end, support facilitation shifted the responsibility of changing classrooms for service delivery

from the student to the special education teacher. In other words, special education teachers rotated to general education classrooms to provide services to students. The process of the teacher rotating classrooms was explained by Amanda who stated:

“[I]nstead of the students leaving their classroom or kind of coming to a resource room, we come to them... the point of it is so the kids are staying with their regular ed. peers”.

Therefore, support facilitation varied from the previous pull-out method in which students were removed from the general education classroom to receive supports and services in a separate, resource setting. In the pull-out method, special education teachers remained in their own classrooms, and the students went to them for instruction. Rayna explained that support facilitation was beneficial to students in that they were no longer pulled from whole group instruction to receive services, but instead special education teachers were now able to provide the supports and services while the student received instruction:

“[W]e don't want to pull them out of the classroom so that they're missing instruction when you're pulling them out. So, if you can go in there and you can assist them where they're at, provide things right there at that instructional level, they're not missing anything. You're helping them to be successful in the classroom”.

However, some participants explained that despite the requirement that students with disabilities receive their services in the general education classroom, they felt as though students would be better served if they received services in a resource setting. The practice of removing the students from the general education classroom remained off the record, “off the grid”, since it was not always permissible according to their IEPs or to school and district

policy and procedures. For example, Patty explained that she continued to remove students from the general education classroom to remediate in areas where the student is lacking the skills necessary to be successful:

“Although, off the grid, we take them out of the classroom. We're not supposed to, but, to ...just to firm up some of those skills they need to be successful at the grade level skills.

All seven participants stated that they pulled students to work in small groups in a quieter location in the general education classroom. Moving to a designated area in the classroom allowed them to pull students to provide services while remaining in the general education classroom. Further, participants indicated that policy and procedures established within their schools required that they be selective of the timing of their small group instruction. For example, Kayla explained:

“I cannot pull a child, one of my students, from a whole group instruction. Because I don't provide the whole group instruction, I provide the support. So, I'm very diligent in where I will not take that child out of the whole group instruction”.

The belief that students would be better served in a resource setting persisted across multiple participants. Patty believed that she could provide more supports to students in a resource setting claiming, “it's a fast clip in the general education classroom” and that “small groups give more time” and “more turns to talk” and “get more in-depth”. According to Patty, pulling students allowed her to provide more individualized instruction and provide the amount of time students needed to realize learning gains.

Participants explained that school policy and procedures emphasized instruction of students with disabilities had to occur in the general education classroom and that the practice of pulling students out of the classroom for any reason was forbidden. Since participants believed some students' needs were best met in a resource setting, participants either removed them from the classroom against school policy and IEP requirements, or they ensured IEPs supported the practice. For example, Justine stated that at her school the special education teachers wrote IEPs "strategically" to allow them to pull students out of the general education setting for a prescribed amount of time by gaining parental support:

"But I do have some students who their IEP is written in strategically to say that they can leave the classroom. Those are those parents that agree that that was okay, but most of the time it's expected that I stay in the classroom".

Tertiary Theme 2: Managing Caseloads

Support facilitators provided services to students with disabilities often in multiple grade levels and multiple classrooms. According to the Demographic Survey, participants were responsible for multiple students with disabilities as part of their caseload. Participants' caseloads varied in size. The number of students assigned ranged from 10 to 33, with an average of 22. Caseload size was dependent on the number of students identified with a disability and the number of support facilitation teachers employed at the school site. For a few of the participants, they were the only ESE teacher in the elementary school or one of two ESE teachers. In Amanda's experience, her caseload changed depending on how support facilitation was implemented each school year. In years where she was responsible

for providing supports in reading and another ESE teacher provided supports in math, she had as many as 90 students on her caseload:

“And that's something that's changed from year to year, too. Because, depending on how things work from year to year, numbers of students change. I've had years where I only support reading. I don't support [math], I only have to focus on one subject area, but-but I have 90 kids...And granted I share that caseload with someone else because they're doing the math portion of it, but that's 90 pieces of paperwork I have to touch. But, that's a lot. Whereas, this year we structured it a little bit different, and I have 30 kids on my caseload”.

Participants managed large caseloads of students when considered within the context of the amount of time they had to support their students. Participants shared that they felt overwhelmed supporting several students in a limited amount of time. For example, participants shared that during a 30-minute session, they supported an average of 3-7 students. The amount of time and the number of students they supported prevented them from providing the individualized time some students may have needed. According to Patty:

“There's sometimes it's multiple...sometimes there's three or four in that group or in that classroom...some need more support than others”.

Kayla concurred and stated when providing services to students with disabilities in the general education classroom, the support facilitator typically provided supports to multiple students simultaneously:

“I do K-5, so I have five different grade levels...typically it's all students of that particular grade level and I could have three to six in that group setting...”

Rayna's experience was similar,

“[In] my fourth grade, there's six, I think I have six or seven students in that class. So sometimes the teachers will kinda sit them in kind of a cluster area ...”

As data about caseloads of students emerged, the researcher found it necessary to determine the number of classrooms and general education teachers they supported in addition to the number of students for which teachers provided services. Therefore, during the member-checking process, participants were asked how many general education classrooms they supported and how many general education teachers they worked with. Responses ranged from 2 to 14, with the average number of 9 different classrooms and 10 different teachers (see Table 12). Amanda explained:

“Um, in my case I- in particular I have a few different grade levels. This year, it changes from year to year depending on the caseloads. But this year, I have first grade classrooms, I have fourth grade classrooms, I have one third grade classroom, and one fifth grade classroom”.

Amanda expressed frustration over supporting students in multiple classrooms that belonged to multiple teachers:

“You have to mold almost to every classroom that you're going to be in, too. Because you're- like for me I have, let's just say 12 different classrooms that I go into. That's 12 different behavior management plans; that's 12 different schedules; that's 12 different structures; and 12 different teaching styles maybe.”

Table 12:

Participant Caseload Data

Participant	# of Students on Caseload	# of Teachers Supported	# of Classrooms Supported
Patty	33	14	14
Jasmine	16	2	2
Kayla	21	12	9
Justine	18	13	10
Amanda	30	13	13
Rayna	26	10	10
Emily	10	2	2

Five of the participants supported individual students with disabilities in 10 or more classrooms. However, two of the participants, Jasmine and Emily, supported students with disabilities in two classrooms each. In Jasmine’s case, she was employed at a charter school where special education services were “departmentalized”. Jasmine explained that departmentalization meant that each grade level had an assigned special education teacher and all students with disabilities received services in one or two classrooms per grade level depending on the number of students with disabilities. By departmentalizing, the school employed six special education teachers, more than any other school included in this study. Additionally, Jasmine explained that departmentalizing allowed their special education teachers to: (a) limit the number of classrooms and general education teachers they supported; (b) spend more time in one classroom; (c) allocate more time to meeting student needs; and (d) collaborate with the general education teacher in more meaningful ways, including preparing lesson plans.

For Jasmine, departmentalizing was a positive experience since she was able to be “in those two rooms all day, every day, helping students with whatever they need”. Remaining in the same two rooms daily allowed her to “work hand-in-hand with the gen ed teachers”. Jasmine was one of the only participants who claimed to collaborate with the general education teacher to plan lessons and differentiate instruction. Specifically, Jasmine stated,

“[W]e are collaborating with the teachers that we're working with. That we are, you know, talking with them about what the lesson plans are. You know, how we can differentiate or tweak things that might need to be tweaked for some of the lower performing kids. Forming small groups, working with the kids, pulling data, and basically monitoring the kids' growth”.

Additionally, Jasmine shared that the departmentalizing allowed the special education teacher to teach whole group instruction as the lesson warranted,

“You know, how to do this lesson, or you know a lot of the times we'll just be in the classroom, and I'll just jump into the lesson and start teaching. And it just flows that way”.

Jasmine's experience differed from other participants due to departmentalization that six special education teachers (one per grade level) could provide. Other participants stated they were either the sole special education teacher for all grade levels from K-5 or one of only two teachers. Since other participants worked across grade levels and entered several classrooms a day, they did not have a similar experience.

Emily also had a different experience than the other participants. In past years, Emily was responsible for supporting several classrooms like the other participants interviewed.

However, Emily's experience with support facilitation varied each year based on the students assigned to her caseload. Two other special education teachers were employed at Emily's school. Unlike previous years, in the year this study took place, Emily had a fifth-grade student who required extensive supports in the general education classroom. As such, Emily provided intensive supports for most of the day to a student with intensive needs to meet the IEP goals and service delivery. Supporting one student most her day meant that Emily spent almost the entire day in the same classrooms. When the fifth-grade student went to specials (e.g., physical education, art, and music), lunch, or recess, Emily provided specially-designed instructional supports to other students grouped in one first grade classroom to meet each of those students' IEP goals and required accommodations. Therefore, Emily only entered two different classrooms on any given day. Contrastingly, five other participants entered 10 to 14 general education classrooms to support students on their caseloads.

Tertiary Theme 3: The Time of Each Support Facilitation Session

Interview data highlighted a focus of the support facilitation model on time allocation of teachers to provide supports and services to students within the general education classroom made by administrators or those making policy and procedure decisions. Time allocation was further dependent on the master schedule. When asked how support facilitation worked, Patty's response immediately focused on the amount of time:

"I move around. I'm like only 30 minutes in one place at a time. Sometimes I'm there for an hour if the schedule has worked out. But, it's required that we're there 30 minutes. If we do support facilitation, you have to be with them 30 minutes in the classroom".

Similarly, Emily's early experiences with support facilitation, a role she has been in for six years, has required her to be in each general education classroom to provide supports to students for 30-minutes:

“So, I would go into a third grade classroom a half an hour for reading, and then go into a second grade classroom for a half an hour for reading, and then go into the third grade classroom”.

Kayla concurred, stating that “30 to 40 minutes per session” was typical. However, Kayla further explained that in her district, support facilitation was structured to be a tiered system of supports, much like MTSS. Although Kayla was the only participant who mentioned a tiered system, all participants mentioned the significance of time allocation:

“[S]upport facilitation does have three tiers. Tier 1 meaning maybe 30 minutes a day. A Tier 2 student maybe need 30 to 45 minutes per day, and a Tier 3 student may need 60 minutes a day”.

This tiered system in Kayla's experience required the special education teacher to increase the number of minutes they provided supports or services on a sliding scale based on student need. However, Kayla indicated that even if a student needed the most intensive supports (Tier 3, 60-minute session), providing the amount of time is not possible within the support facilitation model:

“However, our schedule and the amount of the people that we have working with us we cannot, we cannot provide that extra time. If that student is let's say in the support facilitation Tier 3, that really needs that 60 minutes a day, I cannot provide that. Because, first of all I'm going K-5 and I have about 30 minutes per group that I can

allow, allocate, for each student. So, I really wish that we had more time for those, say our Tier 3 students that need extra time, that I can provide that service. But, I can't when there's only two support facilitation teachers and we have K-5. I, we just ... There's no time in the day to do that.”

In Rayna’s experience, the number of minutes was dependent on the time provided for the reading or math block and often meant she was in any given classroom for half the students reading block and half the students math block twice a week:

“Well for the model that we use it's, most of the time it's twice a week for reading for 45 minutes, so it's 90 minutes a week. So, half of their reading block twice a week, and half of their math block twice a week.”

Tertiary Theme 4: Providing Accommodations

As part of their role and responsibilities within the support facilitation model, participants ensured that students with disabilities received accommodations consistent with their IEPs and were provided the supports necessary to access the general education curriculum. Participants in this study were familiar with students’ IEPs, specific accommodations, and the legal aspects of providing the accommodations. As such, they not only provided accommodations, but also ensured accommodations were provided by the general education teacher. For example, Justine advocated for her students by ensuring accommodations were provided:

“I make sure that accommodations are being provided. So, if someone has that they need a preferential seat, I make sure that that's actually happening. And, I make sure that the students are on track...”

In Justine's experience, her school differentiated between students who provided classroom accommodations and assessment accommodations. In the event the student required a classroom accommodation (e.g., printing the notes, proximity), the accommodation was provided by the general education teacher and Justine assured its implementation. In the event the student required an assessment accommodation (e.g., instructions or questions read aloud, separate testing location), Justine stated that the district preferred she provided the accommodation.

“But I mean, like tests, especially if it's a district or state assessment, then they would, they want the ESE teacher to provide them.”

This delineation ensured students received their accommodations by only affecting *who* provided the accommodation. However, a consequence of this type of delineation according to participants was: (a) it led to general education teachers believing that providing testing accommodations was not their responsibility, or (b) would lead to confusion about whether the accommodation was classified as classroom-based or assessment-based. Other participants shared their frustration with the unintended consequences of delineating accommodations in this way. Participants believed that providing accommodations was a shared responsibility with the general education teacher. Emily believed recognizing students with disabilities as a shared responsibility was especially important since she was only scheduled to be in each classroom for a limited amount of time, leaving general education teachers as the primary instructors.

Participants shared concerns that accommodations were not provided by the general education teacher when the participant was not scheduled to provide the supports themselves.

This struggle was evident across participants. Several participants indicated their frustration and concerns. This sentiment was captured during Rayna's interview in which she stated:

“...make sure they're getting their minutes, and that they are getting their accommodations. Make sure that you're communicating with the gen. ed. teachers to ensure that they understand what accommodations to provide for those kids ... because I'm not in there all the time. So, I'm fighting for my kids when I don't feel like their accommodations are being fully implemented, and when I see them struggling because of it, you know...”

In Kayla's experience, her role was not only to provide students with their accommodations, but to work with general education teachers to expand their understanding and importance of accommodations. According to Kayla, this required a significant amount of collaboration and conversation. Although many teachers Kayla worked with came to an understanding of their need to provide accommodations, it was not an easy task and many remained under the assumption that educating a student with a disability was not a shared responsibility:

“Well, they don't feel, again, they don't feel that they, that student, that ESE student is their student and they're responsible. They kind of think it is just my student. So, we have to talk about the MTSS system, we have to talk about the laws that, that go behind an IEP. That yes they are responsible as well as I am to provide that student whatever that student needs as well as the accommodations.”

Tertiary Theme 5: Supporting the General Education Teacher

A tertiary theme that emerged within support facilitation was the belief that part of the role of a support facilitator was to support, and even educate, the general education teacher on matters concerning students with disabilities. All participants shared that they felt obligated to inform general education teachers about special education laws, policies and procedures relating to IEPs, accommodations, and other instructional requirements pertaining to students with disabilities.

For example, Emily stated, “I’ve always felt like a huge part of my job was not just giving services to the students, but really supporting the teachers”. Each of the participants described the theme of supporting the general education teachers. Emily further stated that she felt as though she could “bring some of that ESE knowledge” to “help them with what they’re dealing with” to “support them”. Emily recognized that general education teachers had effective teaching strategies of their own, and believed that combining their approaches and sharing their strategies would be beneficial to other students, as well.

Similarly, Jasmine acknowledged that due to her role as support facilitator, her time working with each student was limited since she was only scheduled to be in each classroom on certain days of the week and at certain times of the day. Therefore, she believed that supporting the general education teacher would enable them to support students when she was not scheduled to be there:

“[W]hen you “push in”, they might not need help on Tuesday, but they might need help on Wednesday, but you’re not scheduled to be in there on Wednesday. So, you

know, that part makes it really hard. And, I noticed when that's how we were doing it, the general ed. teachers were struggling.”

Participants not only mentioned supporting the general education teacher, but also felt as though they needed to “educate” them. As reported by participants, time allocations within the general education classroom followed scheduled times of two to three times a week for 30-45 minute sessions. This limited time meant that the general education teacher was responsible for providing services and supports to students most of the school day. This responsibility placed on the general education teacher left the special education teacher feeling as though they needed to teach them strategies to differentiate instruction to meet individual student’s needs. Participants voiced concerns that the general education teacher did not have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities. Further, they believed that teachers who did have a deeper understanding of how to meet diverse learners’ needs would be at an advantage over those who did not. For example, Rayna stated:

“So, a gen ed teacher getting a special education certification is very beneficial because ... Which is why I did it so that if I ever got placed, I want to stay in ESE, special education, but if ... In the general education classroom, the benefit I would have is that I understand the needs of diverse learners.”

Kayla believed that special education teachers had specialized skills that went beyond those of a general education teacher. She further voiced concerns that district officials expected special education teachers to serve as resources of professional development for the general education teacher. This was concerning to Kayla who stated:

“I think that our district expects us, as ESE teachers, to educate our gen ed teachers and, unfortunately, we don't happen to always have the time to do that. So, I feel as an ESE teacher, all of our team is very, very educated. We go to workshops all the time; we continue education. Whereas, I just feel that our gen ed teachers lack a lot of that knowledge that we have, that we don't have a lot of time to sit and educate our gen ed teachers about. You know, we're working all day long and I can't really sit down and say, ‘Hey, this is what I've learned’, ‘this is what works for my students’, you know, ‘why don't you try this?’ So, I think there's a, there's a gap there.”

Tertiary Theme 6: Supporting Academic Needs

Participants supported student learning through implementing various teaching strategies and differentiating instruction to meet the individual needs of students. These strategies were as simple as clarifying, relating information to personal experience, or using graphic organizers to represent knowledge. For some participants like Jasmine, differentiating instruction meant the use of validated and evidence-based comprehension strategies such as the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR). Kayla stressed that she used different approaches and different strategies guided by data to ensure that her students “were responding to the most intensive interventions” she could provide.

Amanda believed her role was to consider “each individual student’s needs” and determine, “how can I help get...them to that end point?” Amanda provided the following example of how she considered and addressed individual student needs:

“So, if I have a student, for example that ... we're trying to compose an essay. And I know he has these great ideas, but he has a hard time organizing them. So, for him I

may use a different graphic organizer than the other kids use to organize his ideas in a way that's going to work for him.”

According to participants, supporting student needs and providing specialized instruction was their primary role in the support facilitation model. This could be accomplished through various teaching strategies as Rayna explained:

“Provide ones who need support the support that they need, show them more how to do it, maybe with manipulatives, or showing them how they can work it out differently. Or with reading, making sure that they understand what is it that's being asked, trying to clarify things so they have a better picture...”

However, much like with providing accommodations, participants stated that general education teachers did not assume responsibility for the instruction of students with disabilities. Participants did not believe that students on their caseloads received academic supports beyond their services. It was the participants’ belief that general education teachers did not sufficiently differentiate instruction or provide intervention beyond typical classroom instruction. For example, Kayla stated:

“A lot of teachers feel that if they're being serviced by an ESE teacher that that is my student, I'm taking care of that student. That they don't feel responsible. So, we have a lot of discussion about how those gen ed teachers need to be pulling those students. That my students being identified are Tier 3 students and that, yes, I am working on their IEP needs, goals and objectives. However, that gen ed teacher also needs to be pulling that student. So, the majority of my teachers will do that but it needs a lot of

support. It needs a lot of conversation to get that teacher to give that student what they need outside of my service”.

Tertiary Theme 7: Supporting Behavioral Needs

In addition to supporting students’ academic needs, some participants shared their experience with an increased demand to support behavior needs. Patty shared that in her experience, student’s “noncompliant” behavior could “totally side track your lesson” and “stop the learning of all your kids”. Patty expressed a need for teachers to have the skills and knowledge to effectively intervene with behaviors. As a support facilitator, Patty realized that general education teachers at her school struggled with behaviors, especially new teachers.

Similarly, Justine believed that challenging behaviors could affect learning for all students in the classroom and that the general education teachers she supported needed more training in behavior intervention and knowledge of how to effectively manage behaviors class wide. She voiced a concern that many general education teachers were quick to refer students to special education for behavior concerns, when the problem was potentially not with the student but with the teacher’s classroom management approach:

“They just need a little extra work. They’re just struggling students...but a lot of times teachers will automatically... I’ve noticed teachers will automatically jump and say something’s wrong, they need an IEP, and all this stuff. But then a lot of times I think it’s, um, them not actually having training in knowing, like, when something is, could be going on, or ... I see is like, they want behavior support. But a lot of times

we see that it really, they- They don't have- They need more training in classroom management and maybe this wouldn't be what it is.”

Supporting behaviors in the general education classroom was part of Amanda’s role as a support facilitator. However, her experiences differed from other participants. Amanda has a background as a social skills teacher and as part of her role as a support facilitator, she provided social skills and behavioral supports in the general education classroom consistent with students’ IEPs. All of Amanda’s students had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and required social skills training –as determined by the needs assessment data and goals on their IEPs. The behavioral supports Amanda provided included monitoring progress for behavior goals and conducting behavior checks. Social skill instruction for many Amanda’s students with ASD was provided in a separate classroom setting as well as in the general education classroom to facilitate generalization of the skills. Amanda described her experiences working with students with ASD and her need to assist students with their behavior:

“And now I'm dealing with a- a group of students that struggle with- in a regular classroom, whether it be with the noise, or the pressure that they feel, the frustration. And, helping them cope with those behaviors but still be able to be around their general education peers”.

Amanda stated that her role in managing behaviors had been challenging since she supported students in 12 different general education classroom settings. For each of the 12 classrooms, the general education teacher fostered their own classroom environment guided by that classrooms “norms” and had their own approach to managing behaviors (e.g., token economy, reward-based management, punishment based-management). Further, some

general education teachers had different philosophies about what classroom behavior should look like. Participants had to be acquainted with each teacher's approach to effectively manage behaviors in that specific environment.

Research Question Two

The second research question addressed in this study was, "What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with providing supports in inclusive settings?" The meaning behind participant experiences was found in the descriptions provided during the interview process. Some of the participants felt that their role as a special education teacher changed for the better, but had come with increased responsibility (e.g., more students on their caseload), increased knowledge requirements (e.g., data-based decision making skills, strategies to support student learning), and an increased need to fill student gaps in learning.

As participants left their own classrooms to support students in the general education classroom, they experienced several changes in their overall job responsibilities.

Identification and evaluation of students for special education became the function of a school psychologist as participants assumed more responsibility for supporting an increased number of students in a limited amount of time. All participants saw an increase in the amount of paperwork associated with their positions and legal compliance became a significant part of their roles. Knowledge of data collection, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making became required skills.

Additionally, the change in roles and responsibilities came with increased collaboration and communication with a variety of stakeholders, most notably the general

education teacher. Despite the increased need for collaboration and communication, participants in this study stated that many of the supports (e.g., common planning time) to facilitate effective collaboration process were not provided or were hampered due to adherence to the master schedule. Therefore, collaboration often translated to nothing more than communication since it was often done in passing due to no common planning time, and special education teachers were not included in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or department meetings. Further, the relationship between professionals was one of communication and not collaboration, since the special education teacher did not have a decision-making role in the team.

Within the MTSS framework, participants stated their roles and responsibilities did not extend to providing interventions, instruction, or evaluation for students prior to identification for special education services. Therefore, the primary focus of participants was on providing supports to students already identified for special education services as outlined in their IEPs. Finally, participants felt that providing adequate supports to students was challenging due to various obstacles. These obstacles influenced the participants' feelings about inclusion. Participants felt as though their ability to provide students with supports was hindered by the need to adhere to a master schedule, limited access to resources, and a focus on placement instead of a focus on services.

Participants struggled with the framework adopted by schools across districts to facilitate inclusion (i.e., support facilitation). Participants cited frustrations with: (a) an increased focus on placement over services; (b) lack of time to provide students adequate supports aligned with individual needs; and (c) the ethical dilemma stemming from rewriting

student IEPs to include only what they could provide and not what the student needed. In response, some participants attempted to revert to previous practices (e.g., pull-out) to reconcile their own internal struggles.

Research Question Two: Supporting Data

Theme Two: Role Ambiguity of the Special Education Teacher

Interview data in this study exposed that the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher evolved over time and continued to evolve. Participants felt that change is a part of their role and believe that flexibility and adaptability are required characteristics. Participants indicated their belief that the changes are part of the position as schools adapt to changes in legislation, policies, and procedures. Amanda stated:

“[Y]our job is never going to be the same thing from year to year ...you have to know that things are going to be ever changing...You're gonna go to a meeting, and they're gonna say, ‘This legislation has changed’. Or, ‘the- the rules for this is gonna change, so we're not doing that way anymore’. And, that you have to kinda just take it and accept it. And think about, okay, how am I gonna take this information that may not be what I want to hear, but make it work for the kids?”

Changes for participants were the direct result of changes in placement for students, but also due to constant changes in procedure. Jasmine explained:

“I've gone from self-contained classrooms to, you know, resource classrooms to ... So, I mean, my roles and responsibilities are definitely different depending on that.

But I've seen in the last, in the last year basically that even as an inclusion teacher, my roles and responsibilities are different than they were.”

Participants shared that being flexible was a job requirement. As Jasmine explained, “the more flexible that you can be, the easier [the job] becomes”.

Tertiary Themes

The theme *Role Ambiguity of the Special Education Teacher* included five tertiary themes: (a) loss of personal classroom autonomy; (b) increased paperwork; (c) legal compliance; (d) data collection and data-based decision making; and (e) no involvement in evaluation for special education.

Tertiary Theme 1: Loss of Personal Classroom Autonomy

Six of the seven participants began their roles as special education teachers working in a self-contained or resource setting. Each had their own classroom, where they were responsible for the creation and implementation of lesson plans, designed their own classroom rules and procedures, and made every day instructional decisions including selecting activities, designing assessments, and selecting teaching strategies to address student needs. Participants shared that when they had their own classrooms, they felt trusted to make decisions and were viewed as professionals. According to participants, they were viewed as professionals because they were able to make instructional decisions and were trusted with determining the best practices to meet students’ individual and unique needs. However, changes in placement for students translated in changes for where teachers provided services. Participants stated that this change was difficult and came with

adjustment. By no longer being involved in each of the instructional aspects, they felt as though they were simply assistants.

The loss of classroom autonomy was evidenced in participants trading classrooms for office spaces. Kayla was one of several participants who stated that she now had an office and not a classroom. Instead, participants take their supplies and instructional materials with them to general education classrooms to provide services to students. For example, Kayla shared:

“I have an office setting, and I have a cart that I cart around all of my materials and supplies. I call it my “classroom on wheels”. And, I prepare my cart for the day. Have to make sure I have all my supplies. My markers, my pencils, everything that I need for that student are with me.”

According to Patty’s experience, entering general education teacher’s classrooms was often “awkward” because they were entering “another teacher’s territory”. Participants moved from classroom to classroom as Rayna explained, and in entering another teacher’s classroom, participants felt as though they were not seen as fully credentialed and specialized professionals, but instead were viewed as assistants. Participants clearly struggled with being viewed as assistants and felt as though they were professionals with expertise to share and their expertise should be recognized. Rayna shared her frustration in this accord:

“you feel like more of a para, like a teacher’s aide...I’m a teacher, I’m not just a teacher’s aide, so if, if you tell me what you’re doing that I can say, ‘hey, I would like to bring this in and we can work on this’”.

Emily explained her understanding of why general education teachers viewed special education teachers as assistants:

“[I]f it was an inclusion classroom and they were getting an ESE teacher in there, they did not get an assistant. So, the teachers kind of treated me like I was the assistant coming in to help because they did not get an assistant. So, so (laughs), which I cannot totally blame them. Because being a regular ed teacher, I understood that you need that help and so this is an adult coming in to help and so, you know...”

Instead of lending their expertise on instructional strategies, all participants shared that they typically assisted in helping students complete assignments, for example Justine stated,

“So, a lot of times they just come in, and I sit and I just kind of work one-on-one with those students on whatever assignment they're working on.”

In fact, some participants stated that they were pulled from classrooms to assist with non-instructional tasks or duties. For example, Patty stated she was pulled from providing services for her students to help supervise in the cafeteria:

“Sometimes, I do, honestly, lunch duty because somebody's out or there's a hole or can you help us out. So, sure I'd be glad to help them out, but then I don't see my kids”.

Similarly, Patty was responsible for opening car doors and greeting students during the morning as students were dropped off at school. Other participants also shared similar non-instructional duties and responsibilities that general education teachers did not have.

As subsequent data illustrates, participants shared being viewed as assistants was the result of spending limited time in the classroom, not being involved in the planning process, and limited professional development offered to general education teacher about the support facilitation process.

Tertiary Theme 2: Increased Paperwork

A common theme across all participants was the increased amount of paperwork that was a significant part of their responsibilities. All participants shared they were responsible for writing IEPs and completing progress reports (which accompanied report cards) that included present levels of performance and progress toward annual IEP goals. Although participants were not included in the evaluation process, they were responsible for compiling and analyzing data to write IEPs, often with no personal knowledge of the student. The data used in this process included: classroom-based assessments, anecdotal notes, and grades from the general education teacher; evaluation reports data from the school psychologist; and, pertinent reports from guidance counselors or social workers.

Rayna stated that when she began teaching four years ago, writing an IEP was challenging. The most difficult part was writing the IEP goal:

“Writing goals, is like, they need to know how to write IEPs because you write them all the time. There's a lot of paperwork.”

Similarly, Patty shared that writing an IEP was an art and required skill:

“[T]he paperwork for an ESE teacher. How to write a good IEP. That's just really, really evolved. I mean, you get better at it as you do it more and more. 'Cause it has

to flow, it has to make sense, it has to link together your goals and your objectives.

And there is an art to it.” (laughs).

Amanda used a similar phrase, “the whole paperwork side of ESE” and stated it was time consuming and was not limited to just completing the paperwork, but also included attending meetings about IEPs with parents and school or district officials. Further, there was an expectation that they “stay on top of that paperwork side of it” which could be challenging as they measured progress towards goals and were responsible for updating goals annually.

Emily stated:

“I would definitely say that's a huge thing of, of writing present levels, of writing goals, of monitoring the goals and taking notes and keeping good notes... Cause, you know, I do have a lot of observational notes, and- and progress monitoring, and making sure, you know, specifically how they're doing on their IEP goals and then writing comments on progress reports that go home with the report card.”

Time to complete the paperwork was an issue described by all of the participants.

Participants were scheduled to be in classrooms for most the day, leaving little room for some participants to even have a lunch break. Many participants echoed Jasmine’s statement that “there's no time built into the schedule for IEPs or anything”.

Tertiary Theme 3: Legal Compliance

Another tertiary theme that emerged across all participants within this construct was the need to ensure compliance with legal rules and procedures governing the education of students with disabilities. Compliance was an important aspect of the roles and

responsibilities of participants by assuring the students received services and accommodations consistent with their IEPs. Compliance was to be documented.

For example, Rayna shared that compliance meant:

“[D]ocumenting to show student progress or growth...documenting so that they know like for their accommodations that we're providing them, what's working, what's not working”.

Similar to Rayna’s experience, Patty stated compliance: (a) provided a way to document student instruction and intervention; (b) highlighted information about what accommodations were provided and how they were provided; and (c) documented student progress towards IEP goals. According to Amanda, a compliance checklist allowed her document the services students received and ensured they were consistent with their IEP. Documentation was necessary during IEP meetings to show the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative that she followed rules and procedures in accordance with the paperwork, as described by Amanda. Further, Emily stated that compliance was important for high-stakes testing because when testing approached, there was “always a big thing about how to make sure that students are getting their accommodations”.

Justine mentioned compliance in relation to students leaving the general education classroom to receive services. In Justine’s experience, IEPs were “strategically” written to allow students to receive services outside of the general education classroom in a resource setting for prescribed amount of time. Compliance in this case was necessary to ensure that students were not pulled from the classroom “for more than their IEP allow[ed]” because then it “becomes a legal issue”. Jasmine stated that her school required the completion of a

“fidelity form” that was “pretty much” an “attendance form” which indicated that if “the kid is there then they’re getting the intervention”.

Tertiary Theme 4: Data Collection and Data-Based Decision Making

A tertiary theme that emerged under the construct of the changes in the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher was the increased significance placed on skills needed to effectively collect and analyze data to make instructional decisions. All participants were involved with the collection of data to monitor student progress towards mastery of grade level benchmarks and standards, as well as annual IEP goals. Further, participants needed to be able to make data-based decisions to address student’s academic and behavioral needs. Participants stated that being able to collect data was important, but they also needed to know *what* to do with it. Specifically, participants stated that they needed to know what data to collect, how to collect it, and how to use the data to drive instruction.

Data were used for multiple reasons. According to participants, data allowed them to: (a) determine if students were making progress towards mastery of standards; (b) measure growth; (c) write IEPs; (d) make recommendations for supports and services; (e) alter instructional approaches to match individual student needs; (f) provide documentation for compliance; and (g) make specific decisions regarding programming and placement. Data were also used to determine differences in student learning.

Participants indicated that data collection did not only apply to students who were struggling. They were required collect data on all students, regardless of levels of performance. As Rayna stated:

“You have to collect data on the high kids, the regular kids, the at-risk kids, and the low kids. Collect data for this and data for that.”

Further, participants indicated that there were multiple sources of data to collect and analyze which could be overwhelming. For example, Rayna was responsible for collecting data from *iStation*, a computer-based intervention program, as well as classroom data and diagnostic, to see “what’s working, here’s what’s not working and then make decisions”. In Jasmine’s case, her school focused on data and allotted time for data meetings between teachers and students every Wednesday. Further, Jasmine stated that data were important to her administrators, and teachers were required to create graphs to represent the data. In Patty’s experience, data were required to make decisions about placement for students in an Extended School Year program. Patty also stated that since her students had IEPs, she had to know where they were in their learning at all times.

Kayla stated that she used data to make decisions about what supports to provide.

“[M]y role is to go to the classrooms and serve that student and I have to monitor their progress to determine if they are meeting that goal. If not, I have to change my intervention... Well, I change it according to the need. So, if I'm using a reading program that I know the student is not responding to, then I have to research and look at other options that I have and then it's pretty much trial and error. You know, we give a student a good semester to determine if that student is responding or not. And if not, we really have to get back to the books, we have to sit down, we have to look at the data. We have to determine, ‘what other options do I have to help that student?’”

Tertiary Theme 5: No Involvement in Evaluation for Special Education

Despite the increased focus on data collection for instructional purposes, participants were not involved in data collection related to special education evaluation. All participants in this study indicated they were no longer involved in the evaluation and eligibility process. In the experiences of the participants, evaluation for special education was the responsibility of the school psychologist. According to the participants, if the general education teacher determined that a student may need special education services, the school psychologist would be contacted and they would complete the evaluation process. The involvement of the participant would begin after the testing was complete and eligibility had already been determined. The school psychologist would complete the report and the special education teacher would become involved.

“[S]chool psychologists go through that whole process, and when they're finished with their report, then the ESE teacher is involved. And, at that point, it's about writing an IEP.”

Justine stated that “once the school psychologist or the staffing specialist or whoever” decided the student qualified for special education, and then she became involved. Typically, two weeks prior to the student being placed on her caseload, she would become involved.

“That's usually two weeks before, and they'll say, ‘This kid's going to be put on your caseload, please get to know them and write an IEP’. And, that's when ... I become involved (laughing).”

Patty shared frustration with her experience of being excluded from the evaluation process, stating that she found it difficult to write an IEP when she was not involved in testing and assessing the student:

“I just feel a little blindsided these years, because I don't know the students coming to me, not like I used to”.

Theme Three: The Lack of Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher within the MTSS framework

A major finding of this study was participants' lack of involvement in the MTSS process. Despite state policies and procedures requiring the participation of special education teachers beginning at Tier 2 in MTSS, all participants stated that they were not involved in the process. All participants further stated that their primary role was to provide services and supports to students who were already identified as having a disability. For some participants, their involvement was *prevented* by school and district leaders and claimed they were not *allowed* to participate in any aspect of the MTSS process. For others, they believed that they were not able to participate in the MTSS process because of a lack of time for involvement, the adoption of school-wide or district intervention protocols including scripted intervention programs, or the use of a computer-based program as a preferred method of intervention.

Tertiary Themes

The theme *The Lack of Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher within the MTSS Framework* included four tertiary themes: (a) participation prior to special education identification; (b) school-wide intervention protocol; (c) district adopted intervention protocol; and (d) computer-based intervention programs.

Tertiary Theme 1: Participation Prior to Special Education Identification

Not only were participants not involved in the evaluation of students for special education services, but they were also not involved in the instruction, intervention, or support of struggling students prior to their identification for special education. Data indicated that once students were identified for special education, participants were invited to student team meetings and would begin necessary paperwork. Although all participants stated they were not involved in the MTSS process, the reasons for their exclusion varied.

For some participants, involvement in the MTSS process was prevented by school administrators. For example, when asked to describe the implementation of MTSS at her school, Emily stated:

“...that is mostly run by the Assistant Principal and so what they're doing is they have progress monitoring meetings with the teachers at certain points during the year.

And, they [administrators] don't really let the ESE teachers be much involved.”

For other participants, involvement in the MTSS process was not possible due to constraints on their time since their primary role was to meet the needs of students already identified for services. For example, Amanda shared:

“I tend to not get involved in the MTSS process. And, I think it's more because of, we have a large ESE population at our school. And, so we don't really have time in our schedules to be part of that team, as much as maybe we would if we had smaller caseloads.”

Rayna stated that she was not involved in the MTSS process because in her understanding, as the special education teacher, her involvement would only be once they qualified for special education.

“After they've gone through all the tiers, it comes to me. And, at that point, we create an individualized education plan, or the IEP, where we take all the information and the data from what they've collected through the tiers and develop goals that we feel the student needs in order to be successful”.

In addition to not working with struggling students to provide necessary interventions and intensified instruction, all participants stated that they were not members of the MTSS team at their schools. According to data, participants were not included in the student study team until the student was evaluated by the school psychologist, eligibility was determined for special education, and an IEP needed to be created. Rayna's experience was shared across participants:

“I'm not involved in the MTSS process of the general education teacher and the coaches, and the staffing specialists, and all those people are involved in the other tiers.”

Justine stated the involvement of the special education teacher began when the student was referred to the Multi-Disciplinary Team at her school and this was just a formality to document that a special education teacher was “aware”:

“Really, whenever they are referred to MDT, which is Multi-Disciplinary Team, this is where the staffing specialists would be there from the district, the school psychologist or guidance counselor, and ESE teachers and gen ed teachers. When that meeting is called, and that's usually after the gen ed teacher says, “I have all this data, this kid, there's something going on”. Then that's when I get involved and that's basically just to say that the ESE teacher is aware of this. And then that way, we get permission to collect more data and, you know, maybe do some psychological testing, whatever it may be. But until they're actually staffed into a disability category then there's no ESE teacher involved.”

When asked at what point special education teachers became involved in the MTSS process, Kayla simply stated, “at our school, it’s after Tier 3”. All participants echoed Kayla’s response. When Patty was asked the same question, she shared that she becomes involved at the very end of the process. Patty shared that her lack of involvement prior to staffing a student was a source of frustration as she found it difficult to write an IEP or attend a meeting for a student of whom she had no knowledge.

“You know, I had a note “We have an eligibility staffing next month.” And I go, so who is this? I don't even know who this is. I don't know anything about them... so, for me to write down the IEP and not really know the student is really hard”.

Emily shared her frustration with not being a part of the MTSS process.

“The ESE teacher becomes involved when it has already gotten to where there is an initial staffing schedule. (laughs)...That was my experience the last couple of years where it's like I'm getting a notice for an initial staffing and I'm going I've never seen ... like, who is this child?”

Emily continued, sharing her frustration with her lack of involvement and stating her desire to change the process.

“It's been a little bit of a frustration for me because it seems like a lot of times we'll get a notice that you have an initial staffing coming up and it'll be like, I've never heard this name before. I don't even know what this kid looks like. How have I not been involved before it got to this point? So, I'm kind of working to try to change some of that. So, I have been trying to go to the progress monitoring meeting for the teachers I work with”.

Participants shared that they were “unofficially” involved in providing interventions to students who needed them. For example, Jasmine stated she was “unofficially” involved in Tier 2, and she “was not invited to meetings or anything until they hit Tier 3”. Additionally, Jasmine’s “unofficial” involvement was part of the culture of her classroom.

“Just in the nature of the classroom that I'm in. We work with them, but I don't necessarily think that it works that way across the school. That just happens to be where we are”.

If participants assisted in MTSS, it was off the record and they would do so in a limited capacity (if they happened to be in the classroom at that time), at their convenience, and only if it did not affect their ability to provide supports to students on their caseloads. They stated

that they could not watch a student struggle and not get involved, but they would do so hesitantly and with reservation. For example, Amanda stated:

“If I'm in a classroom and I'm pushing in and there's a Tier 3 student that's struggling on a specific activity that happens to be what I'm working with my kids on that day, then you know they can come back. Or if you know they are just having a difficult time and the teacher is working with some other students, I'm not going to let that student struggle”.

Tertiary Theme 2: School-Wide Intervention Protocol

Participants described school-wide intervention protocols as methods in which students' instructional and intervention needs were addressed across grade levels. The term offered by participants was “walk-to” intervention. The term “walk-to” characterized a system in which students were grouped by ability as determined by assessment results within their grade levels. Students would “walk-to” the specific group to receive interventions aligned with their specific need. For example, if a student needed extra phonics instruction, the student would meet with a group of same grade level peers who needed phonics instruction during specified intervention times. A walk-to intervention model allows general education teachers to meet specific student needs and differentiate reading instruction across grade levels. Rayna described “walk-to” intervention at her school:

“Walk-to intervention [is] where the teachers, the kids will switch from the classrooms to go to other teachers based on, you know, students' needs. Their data has proven that they've done well with those students, or they're ESE, they have an ESE background, or whatever. Or another teacher might have the kids... They're

[groups] based on their levels. And what they've done is, like, their test scores, if a kid's scores really high here, then on their intervention time is for something else.”

Participants whose school utilized a walk-to intervention model, described how the school-wide program utilized various staff, including office support staff, to provide scripted interventions to students at Tier 2. In this situation, the staff member is assigned a group and provided with the intervention with little to no teacher input. Emily explained:

“And this is a new thing they are doing this year. It's where they have like a whole block of intervention and every teacher and every assistant- In those grade levels are doing some kind of intervention during that block... But, again, that's pretty much just assigned. It's, you know, like they kind of plug in all who can, you know, build, different areas that need, and, you know- and- and they tell us, you know, what to do and what students we're getting... So, it's not a lot of input from even the regular teachers. It's just of just told... ‘This is how we're doing it.’”

Tertiary Theme 3: District-Adopted Intervention Protocol

In some cases, school district personnel select intervention protocols to be used within their schools. Therefore, intervention at Tier 2 could be provided through the adoption of evidence-based, scripted reading programs such as *Corrective Reading*, the *Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)*, or *Success for All*. Participants shared that when a reading program was available to them, they were restricted in the use of other programs or resources. For example, Kayla shared that although she had choice in which program she could choose, she was limited to the district-approved programs.

“[W]e have programs that are approved. I can't just go and find my own resource...we have a *Corrective Reading* program that has been approved by our district. And so, uh, we have *SIM* program, reading program, which is also approved by our district that, I have the flexibility of determining what is best for my students...”

Participants had the ability to match available scripted programs to student needs. However, they could not use unapproved resources or programs. Amanda explained:

“I can give them the type of instruction that they particular need, in their weaknesses. Whether it be through a scripted program working on maybe phonics skills or reading comprehension skills.”

Tertiary Theme 4: Computer-Based Intervention Programs

To facilitate targeted classroom interventions, participants' schools and districts adopted computer-based programs such as *iReady* or *iStation*. Computer-based programs were designed to evaluate students' beginning levels of performance and provided specific and targeted instruction and intervention at their level. Data across the participants whose schools used computer-based programs claimed that the programs: (a) matched grade level standards; (b) identified student deficits; (c) provided opportunities for students to practice their skills to achieve mastery; and (d) generated data and reports for teachers to analyze for instructional purposes. Participants stated their schools of employment established required minimum daily or weekly minutes for students to use these programs, which served as Tier 2 interventions within the MTSS framework. Jasmine described the computer-based program at her school as:

“It's a computerized, adaptive computerized reading program that assesses the students at the beginning of every month, and then gives ... a priority report, and we can pull each student, and see, you know, where they are, and what their deficiencies are. You can even go in and see like, you know, what questions they're getting wrong, so that you can see if there's a pattern. And then it adapts activities and games for them to do every time they log in after that beginning of the month that goes to whatever level that their need is.”

Participants' appeal for these programs was their ability to generate data. Within the MTSS framework, participants shared that data were important for establishing individual student instructional needs and for making decisions such as evaluation for special education. The increased attention on data was a desirable feature of these programs. When asked about the program, participants stated that they were unsure if the computer-based programs improved outcomes for their students. However, participants stated that the programs must be good since they were research-based, received good reviews, and were used by multiple schools. Some participants stated that teachers at their school had concerns about the program because of the time students were required to use the program. Patty stated:

“... it's school mandated they be in 45 minutes a week. And, so the teachers are struggling with that. Because, they have all this pressure to teach, teach, teach, plus 45 minutes of *iReady* to keep 'em going...”

Theme Four: The Changing Role of Collaboration and Communication

As participants left their self-contained or resource settings to provide services and supports to students in the general education classroom, they found it necessary to work closely with other professionals within the school. Therefore, the roles and responsibilities of the participants required an increased level of collaboration and communication, especially with the general education teachers as they worked within their classrooms. Despite the increased need to collaborate, participants voiced concerns over their ability to do so within the support facilitation framework. Some of the tertiary themes that emerged within this construct included concerns such as the need to build relationships, the lack of common planning time, and the value of the role of the special education teacher. In the limited cases where relationships were fostered, participants felt more valued, were included more, and were considered an asset and resource. However, most participants did not foster relationships with the general education teachers resulting in limited communication between professionals. This led to participants to view their roles as classroom assistants.

Participants stated that when they previously worked in self-contained or resource settings, they were limited in their collaboration with general education teachers. Despite having students in common, teachers who provided services in resource settings were able to operate independently of the general education teachers. For example, in Amanda's experience working in a resource setting, she stated that she did not have an open line of communication with the general education teacher. She believed that her current role as a support facilitator opened a line of communication, which was beneficial to the students.

“Well, what's nice about support facilitation is I get to see the general education teacher face-to-face. I always felt like that was hard with pull-out. Because, when I was in my room and they were in their room and the kids would just come to me, there wasn't that line of communication. So, if there's something they're struggling on, they can look at me and say, ‘Hey he did not understand this. Can you do it right now?’”

Tertiary Themes

The theme *The Changing Role of Collaboration and Communication* included four tertiary themes: (a) time for common planning; (b) communication; (c) building relationships; and (d) special education teachers felt valued.

Tertiary Theme 1: Time for Common Planning

All participants in this study mentioned the importance of a common planning time or the desire to be a part of the lesson planning process with the general education teachers. Despite its noted significance, establishing common planning was met with obstacles. Since participants were scheduled to support students in multiple classrooms throughout the day, their time to collaborate or plan lessons was limited. Further, participants in this study provided supports in an average of 9 classrooms and collaborated with an average of 10 general education teachers, which was very difficult to plan with each teacher. In instances where participants did have a role in the planning process, they stated that they had to make strong requests to get a seat at the table.

Participants who did not have the opportunity to be a part of common planning time believed that common planning was an important aspect of collaboration and claimed this was an area for improvement. The lack of established and mutual common planning time left participants to either forgo planning altogether, plan in non-formal ways (e.g., passing in the hallways), schedule planning to occur during non-school hours, or complete planning via email. Amanda explained:

“[U]nfortunately we don't have mutual planning time. So, some of it happens through, I call you after hours, or we send an email to each other... But we find any way we can to communicate. Planning is always like the biggest roadblock ... I feel like ESE/general education coming together. Because there are so many kids, we have to be so many places, and we just want that mutual planning time and it's not possible.”

For Kayla, common planning was impossible since she supported multiple teachers, multiple classrooms, and had multiple students. Kayla stated this is one area for improvement, as it affected her ability to be effective in her practice.

“No, because I teach K-5, so it's impossible for me to be at their planning meetings that they have weekly. That would be one thing that if I could change I would definitely change. I would be more effective if I could be part of the planning process, but because I do service K-5 in my particular elementary school, I cannot do that because I would miss some of my group time.”

For participants employed in schools where planning time was not allocated, administrators required general education teachers submit and upload their lesson plans to the

school's server by an established time prior (e.g., 8am) to the beginning of the school week. This requirement provided participants with access to the lesson plans. Further, participants accessed the plans to familiarize themselves with the lessons and determine areas where they could differentiate, prepare supplemental materials, preview vocabulary, or identify areas where they may need to provide extra supports. In Kayla's experience, the general education teachers she worked with emailed her their plans in advance in addition to hosting them on the server. However, one downside to this system was that if plans changed, she was not aware.

"I do know some teachers have the luxury of being just part of one grade level and so therefore they are able to go in and plan for those, whatever grade level they're teaching. They're able to do that on a regular basis and really have that connection. If changes come up, I may not know, because I'm not in that meeting. So, it takes a lot of effort on both teachers' parts... it's a successful benefit for all of our students."

Although Emily was not originally included in the lesson planning process, she forged her way into the common planning times. Emily stated that she had to essentially push her way in to become a part of the planning process. According to Emily, becoming a part of the planning process changed how general education teachers viewed her and she slowly became a part of the team:

"I was wanting to learn and- and it's like I need to be part of the team. And, so I think before that it seemed like ESE teachers were kind of their own thing and regular-ed, but ... and I was very much saying, I want to come to your grade level meetings. I want to be a part of what you're doing. I want to be on the same page as you,

planning lessons, as you're planning your calendar, I want to be a part of that. So- so then as the teachers started, you know, accepting more of me being there and being a part and more of a team member than just an assistant to come in and help occasionally (laughing), that I- I really saw attitudes changing and the whole kind of culture of it changing.”

Since Emily supported a student with intensive needs in the same fifth grade classroom (as well as eight other children in the same classroom) and the same few students in the first grade classroom daily, she was able to plan every Monday during contracted hours with the general education teachers for each grade level. The common planning time allowed them to create and review lesson plans, determine teaching strategies aligned with student need, and adjust instruction as needed. Further, common planning time provided her with a greater familiarity with the lessons and activities than the other participants in this study. This familiarity allowed her to be more than just an assistant and assume more teaching responsibilities. Emily could co-teach with the general education teachers in a variety of ways. For example, Emily stated:

“So, I teach whole group sometimes and she supports. And sometimes we do, you know, a kind of split classroom where she takes a group and is facing this way and I'm taking a group facing this way and we're both doing similar lessons...and, then we do a lot of station teaching. So, we've got a lot of different teaching strategies that we use together”.

Jasmine was another participant who was able to plan with the general education teachers. As previously described, Jasmine's school departmentalized special education

services. As such, Jasmine was responsible for all fifth grade students with IEPs and all her students were supported in the same two general education classrooms all day. Therefore, Jasmine was able to plan with the two general education teachers. Prior to departmentalizing, Jasmine stated that there was “no way to have a common planning” and that was not very effective. She was happy that her school recently decided to be departmentalized, as it provided the much-needed time to plan which she believed was not only more effective for the students with disabilities, but also had a positive impact on all the students in the classroom.

Tertiary Theme 2: Communication

Participants noted communication with several educational professionals to support students. Educational professionals included: (a) guidance counselors; (b) social workers; (c) school psychologists; (d) academic coaches including the reading coach; (e) administrators; (f) related services personnel (e.g., occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists); (g) staffing specialists and staffing coordinators; and (h) general education teacher(s). Communication was described as a routine part of their roles and responsibilities and necessary for the student. Communication included discussions about IEPs, student needs, and student placement. Participants noted that discussions with guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists yielded pertinent information about the student and often included information they would not have been able to access elsewhere, such as current events in students’ home lives, which affected student learning or behavior.

Participants believed each professional had a unique perspective about the student which provided an understanding of the whole child. Communication was helpful in the

problem-solving process, as multiple perspectives from individuals with varied expertise were shared. Kayla stated that the guidance counselors and social workers shared attendance information about students. Further, Amanda worked with related service personnel who provided their expertise.

“[I]f there's speech and language concerns, the speech and language pathologist may attend to help give insight into interventions that can be provided.”

Communication was such an intricate part of their roles that Patty described collaboration as “huge”, claiming that being a special education teacher was “very much a people...skills profession”. Additionally, Patty believed that a team of professionals could determine services to meet student needs from a problem-solving approach, which would enable them to support the whole child.

“My psychologist is good for insight into what she sees, and then the social worker will give us another side of the story, ‘Did you know this was going on?’ ...It's just really critical I think to get a full picture of the kid. You can assume some things, but it's always better to work together.”

Although all participants recognized the need for collaboration and spoke about their experiences working with other professionals, they stated that collaboration was often unscheduled and informal. The lack of structure to the collaborative relationship (e.g., common planning time, scheduled meeting time, parity across professionals) meant that participants were engaging in communication (e.g., exchanging information) rather than collaboration. Participants often interchanged the words collaboration and communication during their interviews. For example, when explaining collaboration with the general

education teacher, participants stated they would quickly meet in the hallway in passing, exchanged emails, or stopped to talk after faculty meetings. The following description is from Kayla who shared that collaboration occurred when she ran into other professionals in the hallways and would take that moment to connect about a student. When asked when and where collaboration with the general education teacher occurred, Kayla stated:

“[H]onestly just in passing. You know, we'll kind of chit chat and say, ‘Hey how is my student doing?’ And, or they'll come to me and say, you know, ‘Really struggling’, and it just may be on the fly. You know, as we're passing by or if I go to the classroom we'll take a few minutes to say, you know, ‘Can you work with this student in this area?’ Um, so it could be formal and it could be a lot of times informal.”

Tertiary Theme 3: Building Relationships

Although collaboration was a theme that connected all participants, during interviews only two participants mentioned establishing relationships with other professionals. In instances where relationships were fostered, the participants expressed greater satisfaction with their roles. Building a relationship went beyond the typical collaboration and communication. As support facilitators, the majority of participants claimed the general education teachers saw them as assistants, which made walking into the general education classroom difficult. However, for the two participants who built relationships, their lived experiences with collaboration were different. For these participants, building relationships meant building trust, and once the trust was built, there seemed to be a better working

experience and a greater amount of respect between participants and general education teachers.

Amanda stated that building a relationship with general education teachers began with explaining the role of the support facilitator and providing an understanding of the type help they could provide. According to the participant, initially the general education teachers were resistant to having another person in their room. The general education teachers felt that having another educator in the room would result in their teaching being evaluated or judged. This led to resentment and distrust between the two professionals. However, once the role, responsibilities, and purpose of a support facilitator was explained, a relationship was built. Building a relationship alleviated the stress that accompanied another adult being in their classroom, in their “territory”. The significance of building relationships was best described by Amanda:

“[W]hen I first started doing support facilitation with my teachers, we did a lot of, I don't want to say trainings, but we did a lot of things where, we could- I could kind of share with them what support facilitation is like. And I had to really build that relationship with them 'cause I was a stranger walking into their classroom. And then, they had to feel like I'm not there to watch them teach. I'm there to help the kids, but that we have to work together to make it work. And, once I built that trust, it-the, almost the style of our teaching blended together so well, and really changed and helped the students...”

Emily shared a similar experience, stating that once she built a relationship with the general education teachers, they grew to value her and the culture of her school changed to embrace the role she played:

“So, then as the teachers started, you know, accepting more of me being there and being a team member [rather] than just an assistant to come in and help occasionally that I really saw attitudes changing and the whole kind of culture of it changing”.

Tertiary Theme 4: Special Education Teachers Felt Valued

Two of the seven participants in this study stated that they felt valued as professionals. For these participants, their value was measured by how the general education teachers interacted with them. Participants felt valued when general education teachers welcomed them in their classrooms, relied on them for their expertise, and turned to them for their guidance and knowledge. The two participants who felt valued had forged their way in to department meetings, grade level meetings, PLCs, and/or planning meetings. When included in these types of meetings, participants were able to share their expertise and gain the respect of the general education teachers who began to see them as knowledgeable and skilled experts. Participants felt the more they were included in these types of meetings, the more respect they gained from the general education teachers. Further, participants believed that the general education teachers also realized the potential benefit for themselves and students in consulting with the special education teacher.

By building a relationship with general education teachers, Amanda felt more valued. She no longer felt as though she was walking into their territory, but was now a part of the

teacher's classroom. The general education teachers not only turned to her for guidance, but also created a space for her in their classroom.

“[W]hen I established that trust with them, some teachers that I thought might be resisting, were so open to it and were so welcoming. [They] would try anything I offered in their classroom...when you can develop that relationship. I've built relationships with my teachers that I can walk into their classroom and know where all their supplies are. I can walk in and go pick something up. I don't have to carry a big, giant cart of manipulatives because my teachers are going to provide those things for me”.

In fact, Amanda believed that having a space in the general education classroom was a sign of their acceptance. Having a space in the room was a measure of their value of her, especially since she recognized that not all special education teachers are accepted to the point they have supplies waiting for them in the classroom. During her interview, Amanda shared a story of when she was visited by another special education teacher who was surprised that Amanda did not have to carry all her own supplies from classroom to classroom as she visited students. The following exemplifies the feeling of value and belonging that Amanda gained from the gesture in the classroom:

“And I once had a teacher come visit my school, and she said, ‘Why do you bring such a small bag to all your groups?’ I said, ‘Well, because I have stuff in their classrooms already’. And it's that [relationship] building, that makes your job so much easier. That you feel like you're not walking into a stranger's room. That you have a space in their room, and that they're inviting of you into your room, too”.

Like Amanda, Emily fostered relationships with general education teachers, and in doing so felt as though she was their equal:

“Where I feel now, I'm much more as an equal teacher that, you know, I do hold group lessons sometimes and the teachers are in a classroom where, you know, we'll split it up and we're each doing a lesson, or you know. So, it is much more of a role of teacher in the classroom. Like, we have two teachers in the classroom for the whole entire class.”

Consequently, participants who did not or were not able to foster relationships with the general education teachers stated that they felt de-valued. Further, they felt as though they were assistants working under the direction of the general education teacher. Their expertise was not valued or recognized. When asked about collaboration, participants used words and phrases that more appropriately aligned with the role typical of an assistant. For example, Patty stated:

“We can collaborate and talk and work, ‘What do you think would be best? How do you want me to work this?’”

Similarly, Rayna stated:

“I talk to them ahead of time, ‘hey, what would you like me to do?’, ‘Do you want me to bring something in, or would you like me to just work with them on their packet or whatever that they have?’”

Participants provided supports in the general education teacher’s classroom, which participants referred to as “their territory” which they claimed could be “awkward”. For

example, Kayla felt that walking into the room could be difficult, especially if the general education teacher was not ready for them to provide supports. Kayla shared,

“However, that teacher may not be on time that day and so I have to go in and I have to adapt to that gen ed teacher's schedule”.

Further, participants explained they were not only expected to adapt to the teacher's schedule but also to their pace and instructional needs. Activities were planned by the teacher and participants were not included in the planning process. When asked about involvement in lesson planning, participants described making alterations to the plans already created by the general education teacher. Participants described situations in which the general education teacher was in control – from planning to implementation. This often resulted in the participant assuming the role of an assistant. When asked about planning and collaboration with the general education teacher, Justine stated,

“I'll go in and I won't actually do a lesson. I'm just supporting, um, it's support facilitation. So, I can go in and support whatever they're doing.”

Theme Five: The Challenges Impacting the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting

During interviews, participants focused on various challenges they believed influenced their ability to provide special education services to students with disabilities in the general education setting. For participants, providing services consistent with student IEPs in the general education classroom was impacted by the framework (e.g., support facilitation) adopted by the school or district. The roles and responsibilities of the support facilitator as described by participants in interviews required participants to provide services

to multiple students in multiple grade levels for a limited amount of time. Participants stated that some students' needs were greater than what they could address within the constraints of the support facilitation model.

Tertiary Themes

The theme *The Challenges Impacting the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting* included five tertiary themes: (a) master schedule; (b) student skillset; (c) concerns about achieving grade level standards; (d) student mindset; and (e) ethical issues.

Tertiary Theme 1: Master Schedule

The master schedule at each elementary school weighed heavily on the participant's ability to provide services. The master schedule affected multiple areas of service delivery including the amount of time participants were scheduled to be in the classroom, leaving little room for flexibility. According to participants, a school's master schedule required considerations such as each general education teacher's classroom schedule for instruction (e.g., reading, math, science, social studies), specials (e.g., physical education, computer, art, music), lunch, and recess. Further, school-wide testing, such as district-mandated diagnostic exams and state exams, influenced the master schedule.

When asked what expectations their supervisor had for them, all participants stated that they were expected to follow their schedule. Amanda stated:

“[P]retty much just that- that I'm following my schedule. I'm where I'm expected to be, because those teachers are expecting that at this time I'm coming in, and I'm

coming to support those students. And that I've looked at their lesson plans, they know what I'm there to support. And, so I'm expected to be where I say I'm going to be at the time.”

Justine echoed this statement and added that she was limited in what time of day she could pull students for services as she was not able to pull them from reading or math instruction.

“I have a schedule to follow. And it- It makes me hit at least every class once a day, just based on students' IEP services... I do not pull out of core or academic times like reading and math, but I don't pull out for that. I only pull out during science time or maybe, usually it's recess, actually. I would never take them from the math and the reading [instructional time].”

Each participant was scheduled to be in a classroom at a specific time of day for a specific amount of time. However, as Jasmine noted, education does not always occur at a specific time. In her experience, a student may need help on Tuesday, but not be scheduled to receive services until Wednesday. As Jasmine stated, this type of situation makes it difficult for both the students and the teachers. Frustration with following a master schedule was also linked to the time of day participants were scheduled to be in the classroom. Time with students is mapped out based on the master schedule, but the general education teacher may not be running on time. The general education teacher not being on schedule affects the support facilitator, as they cannot provide services during whole group instruction. Although participants understood there would be circumstances in which the general education teacher could be off schedule, they did not have the flexibility to come back at another time.

According to participants, without flexibility to reschedule services, students would not receive the support consistent with their IEPs. For example, Kayla shared:

“I guess I would have to say it's very difficult to go into a classroom that is ready to have you be there. At the beginning of the year, there's that big master schedule and we have to plan our time with our students according to their master schedule. So, when I know they're in their group center time, that's the time I go in. However, that teacher may not be on time that day and so I have to go in and I have to adapt to that gen ed teacher's schedule. And it changes all throughout the year. I may go in and they're in whole group and then I have to sit in the back of the room. I have to still service my students because I can't change my schedule. Once my schedule is made, I can't say, ‘Oh I'll come back in 30 minutes’, because I'm on to my next group. So, I'm very rigid in my schedule once it's set, so gen ed teachers have to be ready for us to come in.”

Practice or participation in district or state testing led to changes in the master schedule that would prevent participants from providing IEP mandated services. Participants were unable to provide instruction or intervention during testing. Further, the participants were unable to reschedule the time since they could not pull them from classroom instruction or other activities (e.g., physical education, music, art). Participants felt frustration with not being able to provide services consistent with student's IEPs and felt powerless in preventing this situation from arising. As exemplified in Rayna's experience:

“I don't have any control over that, so I feel like during those times, okay, so they're missing those services and it's just so much; it's disruptive... they just miss their service times. And there's no room in my schedule to make up that time.”

Tertiary Theme 2: Student Skillset

When providing special education services, most participants focused on student deficiencies and not their abilities. Participants felt that students on their caseload had missing foundational skills and it was necessary to focus on areas of deficiency to fill gaps if students were to be successful. In addition, participants felt that the general education classroom was too fast paced, which only served to widen the gap between students with disabilities and their peers. Although participants worked to fill the gaps, their ability to provide interventions aimed to improve skills were limited due to time constraints. They were not able to provide the necessary instruction to close the gaps. As such, they believed that a slower pace setting would better serve student needs. To provide a smaller setting, participants worked in small groups with their students in the back of the general education classroom.

For example, Patty stated that the general education classroom was a “fast clip” where students “don’t always get the skill” but “they have to move on”. Similarly, Justine stated that the general education classroom can be too fast paced for students on her caseloads and requires her to focus on gaps:

“I focus a lot on the skills. So, where, like, in the general education classroom it's, like, broad and it moves fast. I kind of fill in those gaps. So, if they need fluency

work, that's, like I work on exactly what students would need. A lot of time, it's reading”.

Filling the gaps can be difficult because participants are not able to pull any resources and do not want to “pull material that is drastically different than what they're doing from in the regular curriculum, because then the students tend to get behind”. Rayna felt the gap would often widen to the point that students should be considered for retention. This was an area where Rayna saw the pros and cons of retention, stating:

“One thing builds upon another, whether it's reading, or math, whatever. And if they don't acquire those skills in the early grades, and they just keep passing them along, which is another issue, you don't retain anybody. You know? Certainly, places do ... I'm like, iffy on that. It depends on the student, sometimes it's beneficial.”

Tertiary Theme 3: Concerns About Achieving Grade Level Standards

As part of their roles and responsibilities, participants were expected to provide supports to students with disabilities so they could master grade level standards. However, participant comments during interviews indicated they had concerns about student ability despite their desire to maintain high expectations for student achievement of standards. Some participants believed students lacked foundational skills, making it difficult for them to achieve at grade level.

When asked if there was anything about her role as a special education teacher that she wanted to share but was not asked, Jasmine replied:

“They [general education teachers] get so worried about the standards, and the benchmarks, and the blueprints. It is hard to step back from that, and say like, I get

that this is where they're supposed to be, but they're really down here. And it's not about getting them to be way up there. It's about getting them to be a few steps higher than where they are... I never use the curriculum that I was given. It was always I looked at the standard to figure out what the kids needed and went from there. Because most of the time, the kids that I had were too low readers, and they couldn't read the curriculum anyway. So, it was kind of a waste...And it can be so overwhelming that, you know, you look at all of those things, and you kind of forget that these students don't necessarily need to be there.”

This was not an isolated sentiment. Patty stated that meeting more rigorous grade level standards such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was difficult for her students as it required them to think more deeply, something she was not sure they were capable of doing:

“[B]ut it is really more in-depth thinking...You know, the common core is really teaching the kids how to think deeply. And, it's hard for my kids to think deeply. They're very literal. They're very surface. So, my challenge is "Okay, let's think a little deeper." And challenging them to think deeper. Especially my fourth- and fifth-graders. 'Cause they want to be done. So, they want to read it once through, and then be done”.

Similarly, Rayna stated that her students “don't want to read” and “can't do any of the grade level work”. This finding was important as participant’s primary role was to provide supports to students to enable them to not only access the general education curriculum, but also to master the grade level standards.

Tertiary Theme 4: Student Mindset

Some participants believed a major part of their role was to empower students to develop a growth mindset. In participant's experiences, students lacked motivation to excel due to previous academic failures. Participants believed that struggling with success has led students to avoid tasks, lack motivation, or experience anxiety and frustration. To be able to address academic needs, participants felt they first needed to address their students' mindset. Further, participants shared that in some instances students with disabilities were afraid to ask for help in the general education classroom for fear of what their peers may think of them.

For Rayna, students need to know that they had a person standing behind them that believed in them. She felt that she needed to be their cheerleader by building their confidence and believing in her students. In Rayna's experience, many of her students had experienced academic failures and were often discouraged when receiving poor grades. As such, Rayna was compelled to encourage them to keep trying.

“[J]ust encouraging them, ‘Hey you can do this. It's okay’, ‘My teacher doesn't understand me. She just marked everything wrong’, I tell the kids, ‘No the teacher did not mark everything wrong and she's giving you an opportunity to make corrections. So, you can sit and complain that she marked it wrong. Or, you can try again’”.

Similarly, Emily felt that an important part of her job was to motivate her students. Emily acknowledged this was particularly important with her fifth graders as they failed so

often, they avoided trying. The challenge for Emily was to get her students to recognize their strengths and to build on their successes:

“[A] big part of my job is just developing rapport with the students, because I feel like ... I feel like my job title sometimes should be just “motivator”. That’s because I feel like that- that a lot of what you're doing is just motivating them to try. ‘Cause especially when you're working with fifth-graders who have had years and years and years and years of failure, and so they see more of the ‘I can't’ than anything else. And it's just getting them to change that, getting them to see their strengths and see all the things they can do and see what they're really good at, and trying to build on those successes. And, so, I think just, you know, motivating them to just try. Because a lot of times, they're used to failing. So, why try? ‘Cause if I'm just going to end up in failure, why put myself out there?”

Likewise, Patty believed her students experienced so much failure by fourth grade that they found it difficult to persevere. Patty described her experience with student mindset and she needed to address their motivation. In response, Patty began using ClassDojo. ClassDojo is an application that promotes an improved student mindset by giving students a voice and rewarding positive behaviors, including academic behaviors.

“It seems like the thing holding them back, I'm realizing, is their mindset. They have failed so much. They shut down. But we do this dojo at our school where they... it's more where they can earn points, earn ... and part of it is mindset. And about the growth mindset. So, I’ve been taking time to do that with them. And, you know, the power of yet, they don't have it yet. They can do this. So that's been helping some to

get them to start persevering a little bit. 'Cause they have failed so much by fourth grade. These are fourth-graders. They've shut down, or just check out or walk out, depending on their way”.

Tertiary Theme 5: Ethical Issues

For some participants, the way services were provided within the support facilitation framework was an ethical dilemma. Participants shared that IEPs were sometimes changed to reflect what the school could provide which often conflicted with what the student needed. For example, in some instances, a student may have needed more supports than the school was able to accommodate. However, the student may not have received the extra time or intervention they needed since there was no way the school could accommodate the extra instructional time with their limited staff. Two things contributed to student's receiving limited service time: (a) a lack of time in the participant's schedule to provide much needed services; and/or (b) a lack of personnel to alleviate the demands on each participant's time.

For example, in Patty's experience, she was the only special education teacher at her school site. This meant she was responsible for every student with a disability served in her entire elementary school. Patty stated that changes in administration led to changes in the number of special education teachers employed at her site. Prior administrators provided for additional special education staff in the school budget and Patty had a colleague with whom she could share the caseload of students. However, the current administrator did not think hiring additional staff was warranted based on resources and budget concerns. As such, Patty shared:

“It's been two years since I've not had a partner. So, that's really been hindering. In fact, I had to even change some of their IEPs 'cause I couldn't see them. (sigh). I couldn't see them and I couldn't meet their needs as much. So that's ... I'm not comfortable with that. But I ... 'cause just with me I couldn't see 'em three days a week or four days a week. I could see 'em maybe two. You know?...Sometimes it really bothers me that I'm not really doing what they need. Everything I've read says you need to meet their needs. You need to get - you need to give them what they need, not what I can provide, so that's my biggest struggle right now... I don't know how ethical that is or what else I can do about that...”

Patty stated that her hands were tied and that her principal was aware of the discrepancy. Patty stated that she did not know of other ways to solve the situation. Patty was the only special education teacher employed at her school and her principal insisted that there were not enough students with disabilities in their school to justify employing a second special education teacher.

Emily found herself with a similar struggle. Unlike Patty's situation, Emily believed her administration placed value on ensuring students received adequate supports to be successful in the general education classroom. As such, at Emily's school of employment, three support facilitators shared the responsibility of providing services to students with disabilities. Sharing the caseload with others allowed Emily to provide services consistent with student need as identified on their IEPs and she was not forced to change IEPs to limit student services. However, Emily still found herself advocating for her students to receive the supports they required.

“I was looking at it as that we're not changing their services, we're changing the location of their services. So, if they were getting all day long services, then they needed to still have all day long services, just in a different setting. So, that was my big push. She is like, we're changing all of these IEPs and I would say we're changing all these IEPs as far as setting, we're not changing them as in services. If they were needing the whole entire reading block to be a service, or if they are needing social studies and science services, we still need to provide those services.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings of the study, which explored the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided supports and services to students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Seven participants shared their experiences in semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted to answer two research questions, which guided this study. Findings of this study were organized by each of the five themes discovered and further represented by tertiary themes within each construct. By providing the participant's own words, phrases, and sentences, the researcher accurately represented the experiences of the participants.

The primary finding of this study was the emergence of a shared role for the special education teacher as a support facilitator across all seven participants. In response to changes in placement for students with disabilities, participants experienced shifts in their roles and responsibilities. Participants assumed responsibilities for managing caseloads of students in multiple classrooms with limited time, ensuring the provision of accommodations aligned

with IEPs, supporting academic and behavior needs, and simultaneously supporting the instructional needs of multiple general education teachers. Of the five themes that emerged in this study, the construct of support facilitation was the most widely shared experience with the most commonalities across participants.

The second finding of this study supported the first finding by uncovering shared participant experiences related to changes in their roles and responsibilities. Participants changed the location of where they provided services from a separate classroom to the general education classroom due to shifts in placement for students with disabilities. This shift in placement affected the roles and responsibilities of the participants. Participants shared their experiences of losing their classroom autonomy and assuming a role of an assistant. Changes in roles and responsibilities also included forfeiture of involvement in the evaluation process, increased paperwork, attention on legal compliance, and the need to collect and analyze data to make instructional decisions.

A third theme that emerged across participants was the role of the special education teacher within the MTSS framework. Participants' involvement in the MTSS process was prevented despite state mandates requiring their participation and expertise. Participants shared their experiences with school-wide intervention protocols, district-adopted intervention protocols, and computer-based interventions. In each of these instances, student data were used to determine areas of need and interventions were provided to address these needs. If student needs were not met through intensive interventions within the MTSS framework, students would be evaluated for special education and the participant's involvement would then be requested.

The fourth finding presented a major shift in the participant's roles and responsibilities with respect to collaboration. As classrooms become more inclusive, participants found themselves working closely with other professionals within the school to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The changing level of collaboration and communication was met with some challenges as participants worked within the support facilitation framework. When participants fostered relationships with the general education teachers, they felt more valued, were included more, and were considered an asset and resource. However, participants faced challenges, which meant they were unable to foster relationships, and were not able to find the needed time for common planning. These obstacles led to participants feeling like classroom assistants instead of equal professionals.

The fifth and final finding in this study was the construct of the challenges impacting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Participants in this study faced challenges when providing special education services in the general education classroom. These challenges varied and were addressed through five tertiary themes that emerged. These themes included: (a) adhering to the school's master schedule; (b) addressing student deficits and fill gaps in student knowledge and skill; (c) exhibiting lowered expectations of students with disabilities; (d) developing a growth mindset to improve student motivation; and (e) navigating ethical concerns arising from limited time to provide supports.

Experiences across participants corroborated each of the five themes. The findings from the interviews revealed the complexity of the role of the special education teacher who works in an inclusive setting. The role of the special education teacher was dynamic and

constantly evolving as school and district personnel worked to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the general education setting.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The final chapter of this phenomenological study: (a) reviews the statement of the problem and research methodology; (b) considers study findings within the conceptual framework provided by Welner's (2001) Zone of Mediation (ZoM); (c) presents study limitations; (d) provides recommendations for future research; and (e) itemizes implications of findings and recommendations for future research.

Statement of the Problem

The role of the special education teacher continues to evolve as schools adopt and implement policies and procedures aligned with federal legislation such as *IDEA*, *NCLB*, and *ESSA*. These mandates require educators within public schools to implement specially-designed instruction and individualized supports using evidence-based practices for students in the LRE (Eisenman et al., 2011; Zigmond et al., 2009) with an increasing focus on the general education classroom. Therefore, special education teachers must be prepared to provide specially-designed instruction and individualized supports (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007) to students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Supporting students in an inclusive setting required collaboration among teams of professionals, most prominently the special and general education teachers (Fuchs et al., 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; Tremblay, 2013) to improve student outcomes.

Collaboration between general and special education teachers was described as shared responsibility (Will, 1986). Sharing the responsibility of students with disabilities

necessitated improved collaboration, increased professional support for teachers (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005), and differentiated instruction for students to access the general education curriculum (Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). Researchers and practitioners asserted a collaborative relationship enhanced content area expertise of the general education teacher with the special educators' knowledge of strategies and supports for students with disabilities (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Further, researchers argued collaboration would support differentiated instruction for all students to access the general education curriculum (Eisenman et al., 2011; Friend et al., 2010; Little & Crawford, 2002; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Murawski, 2006; Santamaria & Thousand, 2004; Todd, 2012).

The roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within inclusive classrooms, however, were dependent on those responsible for implementation, as well as the existing demands and available resources (Thorius et al., 2014). Implementation of education reforms (e.g., inclusion) is often conducted at the teacher level (Welner, 2001) and is shaped by the teachers, administrators, district policy, and local influences. The study of the implementation of inclusive practices was critical as it affected the roles and responsibilities of those charged with its implementation (e.g., special education teachers). Policy changes practice and teachers are the agents of instructional policy (Coburn et al., 2016; Cohen, 1990). Teachers and administrators tend to either intentionally ignore or selectively follow policies (Spillane, 2004) due to a variety of reasons, including personal beliefs. Therefore, there is a critical need for research that explores teacher beliefs and experiences related to implementation of policy (e.g., inclusion) to inform both teacher education and continued research.

Review of Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997) to understand in what ways the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher changed as a result from implementation of federal legislation such as *IDEA*, *NCLB*, and most recently, *ESSA*. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who provide supports for students in inclusive settings in elementary schools?
2. What meanings do these participants make of their experiences with providing supports in inclusive settings?

Discussion of Findings

In this study, five themes of the phenomenon were identified and presented with supporting data in Chapter Four. The five central themes included: (a) supporting students with disabilities within a support facilitation model; (b) role ambiguity of the special education teacher; (c) the lack of roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the MTSS framework; (d) the changing role of collaboration and communication; and (e) the challenges impacting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Additionally, twenty-five tertiary themes emerged within the five themes. This section will provide a brief summary of the findings within each theme followed by a discussion of the tertiary themes, which are presented within Welner's Zone of Mediation (ZoM) framework.

Summary of the Themes

Theme 1: Supporting Students with Disabilities within a Support Facilitation Model

The first major finding of this study was the emergence of the role of special education teacher participants as support facilitators. As evidenced by findings, this role developed in response to changes in placement for students with disabilities. Within this role, participants assumed responsibilities for managing caseloads of students in multiple classrooms with limited time, ensuring the provision of accommodations aligned with IEPs, supporting academic and behavior needs through specially-designed instruction, and simultaneously informing the student's accommodation needs to multiple general education teachers.

According to participants, the role of support facilitation is a relatively recent construct. Additionally, there is no written policy at the state level about support facilitation despite its adoption across districts. Prior to support facilitation, participants, even those with as little as four years of teaching experience, provided specially-designed instruction, supports, and services to students with disabilities in a resource or self-contained setting. However, nearly three decades ago, Stainback, Stainback, and Harris (1989) argued that a new role would emerge for special education teachers as *support facilitators*. Stainback and colleagues (1989) provided a rationale and need for professional development to learn the new support facilitation role, stating “support some skills that need to be provided in personnel preparation programs to adequately prepare special educators to meet the demands of such a role” (p. 151).

According to Stainback and colleagues (1989), the role as a support facilitator was the result of a shift away from,

isolated service delivery that tends to remove a student from regular class instruction and often results in disjointed programs and curricula. The move is toward employing more integrated service models that involve collaboration with teachers to incorporate any needed services naturally into the regular classroom programs and activities. (p. 149)

Data in this study echoed the same finding, reiterating that if implemented with proper training and deliberate implementation, the role of the support facilitator could potentially enable special education teachers to provide services and supports in a more integrated fashion. A more integrated service model would connect special and general education “service delivery, professional staffs, personnel preparation programs, advocacy, and funding” (Nevin, Thousand, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Villa, 1990, p. 43). Despite the drive for more integrated service models, an organizational separation of special and general education persists decades later as special and general education continue to operate in silos. The lived experiences of participants in this study demonstrated the independence between special and general education even though students experienced changes in placement and special education teachers experienced increased communication.

Stainback and colleagues (1989) argued that to be effective support facilitators, special education teacher preparation programs needed to develop specific instructional skills and knowledge. Specifically, special education teachers needed skills in, “providing technical assistance, coordinating programs, and communicating with other professionals,

parents, and students” (p. 151). Findings from the current study indicated that participants engaged in activities related to each of these three areas and would have benefited from targeted skill instruction to improve their practice as it related to these areas. Tertiary themes that emerged in this study were related to providing technical assistance to general education teachers, coordinating specially-designed programming to students, and collaborating and communicating with stakeholders.

Furthermore, Stainback and colleagues (1989) cautioned that there was a considerable need for research on support facilitation, as well as the need to prepare educators to fill the role “so that it does not evolve and operate haphazardly but rather evolves with forethought, planning, and preparation of trained personnel” (p. 152). However, since Stainback and colleagues’ (1989) referenced article was published, no known literature or research exists on support facilitation. Similar to Stainback and colleagues (1989) assertions, findings from the current study suggested the continued need to prepare special education teachers for this role, as well as provide general education teachers and other school personnel, with a greater understanding of the purpose of support facilitation and the best practices to support its implementation.

Theme 2: Changes in the Role and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher

Data from this study indicated participants experienced changes in their roles and responsibilities due to the adoption of a support facilitation framework as the second major theme in this study. As evidenced by data across participants, within support facilitation, participants provided specially-designed services and supports in the general education

setting and traded their classrooms for offices. For some participants, the loss of the classroom equated to a loss of autonomy and resulted in participants assuming a role equivalent to that of an assistant. According to data in this study, changes in roles and responsibilities further included forfeiture of involvement in the evaluation process, increased paperwork, heightened attention on legal compliance, and an intensive focus on the need to collect and analyze data for informed instructional and programming decisions.

Cummings and colleagues (2008) posited that the role of the special education teacher would experience significant shifts due to changes in their professional environment. Similarly, Fuchs and colleagues (2010) opined the role of the special education teacher would change to reflect trends in policies and procedures as special education teachers work in increasingly inclusive settings. Specifically, Fuchs and colleagues (2010) stated that there was a “different, distinctive, and important role for special education” due to a “blurring of special education in a new continuum of services” (p. 310). However, Rock and colleagues (2016) advised that special education teachers may experience role ambiguity as a result of these changes, especially in instances where their roles were not clearly defined.

Data from this study supported the foreshadowed shifts in roles, as each described the changes they experienced in their responsibilities. All participants in this study believed their role had evolved over time and would continue to evolve in response to legislation, policies, and procedures. This theme not only highlighted specific areas where participants experienced change, but also developed an understanding of the result of these changes and its impact on their daily duties.

Theme 3: The Lack of Roles and Responsibilities of the Special Education Teacher within the MTSS Framework

At the outset of this study, the researcher sought to determine the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher within the context of MTSS. Literature suggested that the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher would change in direct response to their involvement in MTSS (Cummings et al., 2008; Fuchs et al., 2010; Sindelar et al., 2014). Additionally, state policy and procedure indicated the involvement of the special education teacher in the MTSS process (e.g., FDOE, 2006). However, participants in this study did not actively participate in the MTSS process. Further, participants described major factors affecting MTSS implementation included school-wide intervention protocols; district adopted intervention protocols; and/or computer-based interventions. Data across all participants revealed their involvement was solicited after the student's needs were not met through intensive interventions within the MTSS framework as provided by other school personnel. Special education teachers were involved with the MTSS process after students were evaluated and eligible for special education services.

One of the original intents of MTSS was to identify students who needed extra supports to reach grade level standards and provide evidence-based early intervention and instruction aligned with the student's unique learning needs (Glover & DiPerna, 2007). To accomplish this, the special education teacher could collaborate with the general education teacher to collect and analyze data to determine individualized instruction and interventions for struggling students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Shinn and colleagues (2016) believed the involvement of the special education teacher in the MTSS process would provide a wider range of interventions. In this way, the role of the special education teacher would include

the instruction of students who have not yet been identified as having a disability or who may not qualify for special education but require extra supports (Swanson et al., 2012).

Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) stressed the importance of including the special education teacher in the MTSS process and asserted that best practices implemented by a specialist (i.e., special education teacher) should begin in Tier 2 and extend to Tier 3. However, Sindelar and colleagues (2014) asserted the extent of the special education teacher's involvement would be influenced the school's policies and procedures of MTSS implementation. In this study, general education teachers provided interventions in Tier 2 and 3 through school- or district-wide intervention protocols and did not include the special education teacher. Participants stated that their primary responsibility was to provide services and supports to students who were already identified as having a disability.

Theme 4: The Changing Role of Collaboration and Communication

Participants in this study experienced increased collaboration and communication. As services were increasingly provided in general education classrooms, participants found themselves working and communicating with other professionals within the school to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The increased level of collaboration and communication produced some challenges as participants worked within the support facilitation framework. Participants who fostered relationships with general education teachers felt valued and were considered an asset and resource. Contrarily, participants who did not foster relationships described issues of non-parity and roles more as classroom assistants.

Collaboration can be beneficial, but it also brings ambiguity to the role of the special education teacher (McKenzie, 2009) if the appropriate structures are not in place to support the collaboration (McLeskey et al., 2017; Rinaldi et al., 2010/2011). According to data from this study, structures such as common planning time, role parity, and inclusion in decision-making meetings (e.g., department meetings, PLCs) supported collaboration. Participants in this study indicated that these structures were difficult in the support facilitation framework. Since participants supported students in as many as 14 different classrooms across grade levels, they did not have the time in their schedules for common planning or decision-making meetings. The exclusion from these meetings resulted in the participants' lack of involvement in important instructional planning and decision-making sessions; therefore, was resulting in the feelings of lack of parity with the general education teacher.

Special education teachers must be prepared to concomitantly manage caseloads of students while collaborating and sharing responsibility with general education teachers to provide a continuum of services in the LRE (Shepherd et al., 2016). This shared responsibility (Will, 1986) requires collaboration and communication to be consistent with the federal legislation (e.g., *IDEA* and *NCLB*) requirements (Fuchs & Fuchs 2005). The importance of collaboration was illustrated in McLeskey and colleagues' (2017) focus on collaboration as a significant part of necessary High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) in special education. The authors of the HLPs recognized the need for special education teachers to (a) collaborate with a variety of school and district professionals; and (b) coordinate and lead effective meetings with professionals.

Theme 5: The Challenges Impacting the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting

The final theme in this study detailed the challenges of inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Participants in this study faced challenges when providing special education services in the general education classroom. These challenges were varied and included: (a) adhering to the school's master schedule; (b) addressing students' skillsets; (c) exhibiting concerns about students achieving grade level standards; (d) developing a growth mindset to improve student motivation; and (e) navigating ethical concerns arising from limited time to provide supports.

Inclusive practices hold a different meaning to different stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, teachers, administrators) dependent on their backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences (Reindal, 2016). These differences in belief systems impact the implementation of policies and procedures related to inclusion (Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Travers, & Wiley, 2016; Kauffman & Badar, 2017). The framework (e.g., support facilitation) adopted by the school or district influences the provision of specially-designed instruction consistent with student's IEPs in the general education classroom. The implementation of the framework resulted in an emphasis on the *placement* of the student over the *services* provided to the student. To this end, participants shared there was a lack of specific time to address instruction or intervention of targeted skills as some students' needs differed from what could be addressed within the constraints of the support facilitation model.

Participants voiced beliefs that the implementation of the framework, which placed significant focus on adherence to the master schedule, affected special education services. Implementation of this framework limited the time participants were able to provide

individualized services and supports to struggling students. In addition, participants believed that some students did not have the foundational skills they needed to be successful in the general education classroom, which moved at a pace faster than some students could handle. Additionally, participants voiced concerns about student ability to achieve grade level standards. Further, participants felt a growing need to address student motivation, which was described as related to a resulting lack of achievement. These challenges to inclusion highlight the need for “responsible inclusion”. According to Kauffman and Badar (2017), “responsible inclusion requires meaningful, appropriate instruction of the individual” (p. 58). Therefore, inclusion can be defined as “the most appropriate setting where effective instruction in meaningful tasks that are relevant to the student’s future can be assured” (Kauffman et al., 2016, p. 4). The priority should be on the effective instruction of the student, not their placement (Anastasiou, Kauffman, & DiNuovo, 2015; Kauffman et al., 2016; Kauffman & Badar, 2017). Furthermore, placement decisions should be made based on student’s individual needs, not on the perceived needs of an entire group of students (e.g., students with disabilities) (Kauffman et al., 2017). In this study, participants shared concerns over the emphasis of placement in the general education classroom exceeding the levels of support that could be provided in that setting.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Welner’s (2001) Zone of Mediation (ZoM)

Findings and conclusions of this study are presented within Welner’s (2001) *Zone of Mediation* (ZoM). Consistent with phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013), Welner’s ZoM was used to develop and guide the study design, inform interview questions, and frame

study conclusions and findings, rather than as an instrument for data analysis. Welner's ZoM is a theoretical framework useful when examining federal educational mandates and reforms, which often did not consider local, political, or social structures (Welner, 2001). Enacting change, especially change that affected the roles and responsibilities of school personnel, is a difficult task often faced with normative and political obstacles (Renee et al., 2010). Change in the roles and responsibilities of the special education teachers who participated in this study disrupted the status quo, creating conflict and discord.

In this study, the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher were determined by administrators at the school level or by school district personnel, who relied on their own understandings of policy and procedures (Spillane, 2004). In addition, access to finite resources, limited professional training, and personal beliefs affected the implementation of inclusive practices and the resulting roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher. District personnel and administrators must address federal guidelines and state certification requirements with these decisions, but their beliefs and biases also inform decisions regarding personnel for implementation. As Welner (2001) asserted, "Because these reforms are very difficult, implementation inevitably falls short of perfection" (p. 8).

As detailed in Chapter 2, Welner's (2001) framework included four intersecting forces that collectively created the ZoM. Welner (2001) opined school location and context mattered for understanding "the impact of these forces (and other)" and was "central to understanding the overall fate of a reform as well as the reform's effect on specific populations" (p. 98). Considering the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers

within this framework provided a greater understanding to the changing role of the special education teacher and lent to the understanding of the challenges impacting its change.

Welner (2001) described schools as sites for mediating four forces and conflicts of Welner's (2001) ZoM on implementation of inclusion. The four forces are: (a) *political* which described the influence of power imbalances across the educational setting; (b) *inertial* which described school practices as they existed in local contexts; (c) *technical* which described the function and allocation of resources such as time, personnel, and master schedule; and (d) *normative* which described deeply held biases and notions about intelligence and ability (see Figures 3 and 4). Each of these forces affected the context in which inclusive practices was implemented. Consideration of these forces was significant to "either promote stability or change" as they are instrumental in setting "the parameters of beliefs, behavior, and policy in schools" (Welner, 2001, p. 95). Understanding and mediating these forces undergird potential changes in the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers.

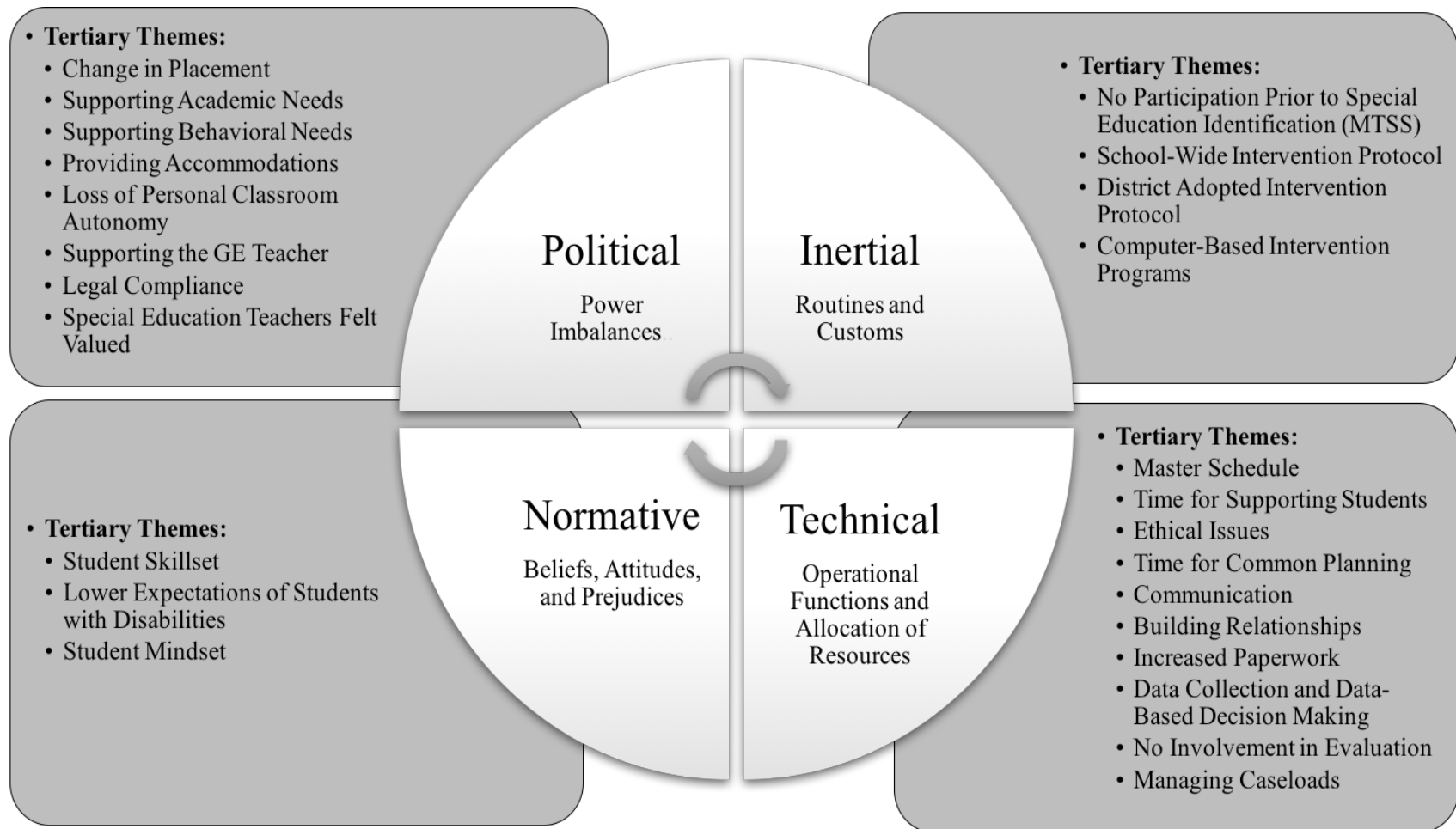


Figure 4: ZoM Four Intersecting Forces (Welner, 2001) and Corresponding Tertiary Themes

Political

Political forces “arise out of the demands and concerns of constituents and are subject to the political imbalances among states, districts, schools, teachers, and parents” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). This study was framed within a political context that included an overview of litigation and legislation that shaped practices for educating students with disabilities. Compliance with procedures set through litigation and through federal laws brought changes to the state, district, and school levels, which ultimately translated to significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of the special and general education teachers. The roles and responsibilities of the special and general education teachers are shaped by policies and practices adopted by schools and districts to implement inclusive practices that benefit all students (Huberman, Navo, & Parrish, 2016). The roles and responsibilities of teachers have changed considerably in recent years (Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016). Therefore, studying the implementation of policies and practices informs implementation of inclusive practices and MTSS frameworks to best utilize the expertise of special education teachers.

Placements in general education classrooms for students with disabilities not only changed *where* services were provided (Prasse, 2006), but also changed *when* services were provided; *how* they were provided; and, *by whom* they were provided. Although special education teachers’ primary responsibility continues, changes in placement affect service provision. Data from this study indicated that although students were placed in inclusive settings (general education classroom), general education teachers still did not assume full

responsibility for their instruction. General education teachers did not view students with disabilities as their own students.

To assure that students with disabilities are considered a “shared responsibility” (Will, 1986) between general and special education teachers, significant struggles continue. Lack of training and understanding of the role of the special education teacher has led general education teachers to perceive the special education teacher as support staff (Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016). Therefore, general education teachers believe the instruction and intervention of students with disabilities is not only outside of their role, but is that of the support staff in their classrooms (Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016). Operating under the auspices of inclusion, special education teacher participants in this study claimed sole responsibility for providing supports and services to students with disabilities. For example, according to participants, general education teachers believed accommodations to support academic and behavioral needs were not their responsibility and were to be provided by the special education teacher. The data from one participant exemplified this finding:

“...Make sure that you're communicating with the gen ed teachers to ensure that they understand what accommodations to provide for those kids ... because I'm not in there all the time. So, I'm fighting for my kids when I don't feel like their accommodations are being fully implemented, and when I see them struggling because of it...”

According to Dieker (2001), “Special educators need to plan and articulate the goals and objectives of a student’s IEP to ensure the student’s success with general education teachers” (p. 22). There needs to be strong collaboration between the special and general education teachers that brings clarity to the needs of students in special education to gain full

access to the general education curriculum (Huberman et al., 2012). To advocate for their students, participants in this study felt that part of their role was to provide professional guidance and support to the general education teacher (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005) about instructional strategies for students with disabilities, the laws governing accommodations, and the legal requirements of IEPs. For example, a participant noted:

“They [general education teachers] don't feel that they, that student, that ESE student is their student and they're responsible. They kind of think it's just my student. So, we have to talk about the MTSS system, we have to talk about the laws that, that go behind an IEP. That yes, they are responsible, as well as I am, to provide that student whatever that student needs, as well as the accommodations.”

Even though participants assumed primary responsibility for supports and services (e.g., accommodations) of students with disabilities, they did not have parity in the classroom. Unlike the self-contained or resource setting, participants who described their roles as support facilitators no longer had a role in typical teacher duties including planning lessons, selecting instructional strategies or activities, or executing instruction. This lack of parity equated to participants assuming the role of an assistant. Exclusion from the planning process is concerning, as research has indicated, “deliberate and thoughtful co-planning is essential to ensure that all students in a co-taught classroom receive appropriate instruction” (Hang & Rabren, 2009, p. 260). Fuchs and colleagues (2014) argued that instructional planning was critical to teacher effectiveness, citing the need for special education teachers to “learn to effectively design instruction to meet the needs of a diverse student population and align with the updated standards” (p. 146). In fact, Fuchs and colleagues (2014) asserted that

instructional planning should be a major focus of all special education teacher preparation programs. However, evidence in this study indicated that special education teachers gained skills such designing instruction, which they could not use due to implementation practices. This is problematic as knowledge and skills of the special education teacher could enhance learning for all students in the classroom.

The view of the special education teacher as an assistant was compounded by a lack of clarity of their roles and responsibilities. When roles of special education teachers are not clearly defined, the general education teacher could dominate instruction, leaving the special education teacher to assist with or monitor instruction (Hang & Rabren, 2009). This finding was supported by Keefe and Moore (2004) who affirmed the importance of establishing roles and clarifying responsibilities of each the special and general education teachers. Dieker (2001) asserted that defining roles and responsibilities was paramount. Role ambiguity is the result of “a series of structural and procedural challenges” which is reinforced by “limited mutual planning, poor administrative support and limited professional development opportunities” (Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016, p. 1073). Therefore, these structural and procedural challenges appear to lead to a power imbalance between two stakeholders: the special and general education teachers.

Participants in this study worked in a support facilitation model. This model was characterized by special education teachers providing supports and services to students with disabilities in the general education setting. Within this service delivery model, participants stated they felt the general education classroom belonged to the general education teacher. Further, participants viewed the classroom where they provided services as the general

education teacher's "territory". Therefore, this setting further placed the participants in a subordinate role. According to participants, entering the general education teacher's classroom was "awkward" because they were entering another teacher's territory.

Participants shared they felt as though they were not seen as fully credentialed and specialized professionals, but instead were viewed as assistants. Participants' struggle with the perception as assistants by others is evident in the following statement:

"I'm a teacher, I'm not just a teacher's aide, so if, if you tell me what you're doing that I can say, 'hey, I would like to bring this in and we can work on this'".

Acting in a subordinate role often meant that participants' skills and knowledge went unutilized and underutilized (Sindelar et al., 2014). For example, data in this study exposed that participants were not in a position to provide instruction or intervention using evidence-based practices. In fact, none of the participants mentioned the use of evidence-based practices when describing their roles and responsibilities. General and special education teachers are required by federal legislation (e.g., *IDEA*, *ESSA*) to use evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes. Researchers have argued that teacher education preparation programs must provide teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills necessary to use and implement evidence-based practices with fidelity (Ball & Forzani, 2011; Little & Houston, 2003b; Leko et al., 2015; McLeskey et al., 2017) which are critical to realize the intent of *IDEA* and *ESSA* legislation.

Improved academic and social outcomes for students with disabilities depend on access to the general education curriculum with appropriate supports and specially-designed education services (Rea et al., 2002; Todd, 2012; Tremblay, 2013). The role and quality of

the teacher (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) and the use of evidence-based practices are also needed to meet the specific educational needs of students with disabilities (Little & Houston, 2003b). However, if other educators perceive the roles of special education teachers as subordinate with few opportunities for instructional input, special education teachers will not be positioned to implement evidence-based instruction and intervention for students to access to the general education curriculum.

Inertial

Inertial forces represented “habits, routines, customs, and practices that are found within most organizations and which, over the years, take on a life of their own” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). This study was conducted to describe special education teachers’ roles and responsibilities pertaining to two different populations of students. The first group of students was identified with a disability, received supports and accommodations in accordance with an IEP, and received specialized services consistent with the Part B of the *IDEA*. The second group of students had not been identified with disability, but required additional supports and instruction to meet grade level standards within an MTSS framework (Elish-Piper, 2016).

This study found that the primary role of participants was to provide services, instruction, and intervention for students who had already been identified with a disability and were to receive specially-designed instruction and supports consistent with their IEPs. All of the participant’s time was allocated to this population of students. Participants were not expected to provide support, instruction, or intervention to students who had not yet been

identified for special education services. Time was not allocated in the special education teacher's schedules to support students who struggled or were at-risk as this continued as primary responsibility of the general education teacher. Therefore, the special education teacher did not participate in the MTSS process.

Initial research questions focused on the roles and responsibilities of the elementary special education teacher within the MTSS process. A review of the literature established that special education teachers would be an asset to the MTSS process as they would possess specialized training in skills related to MTSS (Cummings et al., 2008; Fuchs et al., 2005; Huberman et al., 2012; Leko et al., 2015; Scanlon & Baker, 2012; Swanson et al., 2012). Further, they would be able to implement their knowledge of interventions and specially-designed instruction to meet the needs of students with high-intensity needs who struggled or were at-risk (Deshler et al., 2004; Huberman et al., 2012; Sindelar et al., 2014). However, participants in this study shared that they not only were not involved in the process, but also purposefully excluded and prevented by administration and district personnel from being involved.

Prior to MTSS, the general education teacher initiated referrals to special education after initial concerns were observed. Shifts in legislation (e.g., *IDEA*, *ESSA*) required the use of a tiered system of supports to provide early intervention to struggling students. Early models of the RTI problem-solving framework: (a) allowed students to receive tailored instruction to meet their unique needs (Batsche, 2014); (b) required teachers to evaluate their own instructional practices through deliberate and thoughtful reflection and adjust instruction to support student learning (Fang, 2014; Fuchs et al., 2008); and (c) reduced inappropriate

referrals to special education (Balu et al., 2015; Huberman et al., 2012; *IDEA*, 2004).

However, this study exposed the continued practice of general education teachers perceiving MTSS as what participants referred to as a “fast-track to ESE”.

Participants in this study corroborated research that indicated that the general education teacher was the first point of instruction (e.g., Tier 1), intervention, and evaluation in the MTSS process (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Further, all participants stated that the general education teacher was responsible for providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction for students who were struggling or at-risk. However, this is especially concerning as a review of the literature provided in Chapter Two indicated that general education teachers felt unprepared to meet the diverse learning needs of students in their classrooms (Barrio et al., 2015) and often lacked the ability to effectively differentiate instruction (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005). Research suggested that the expertise of the special education teacher should be provided beginning in Tier 2 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Fuchs et al., 2010; Sindelar et al., 2014; Swanson, 2012). Additionally, state policy (FDOE, 2006) required the participation of the special education teacher, beginning in Tier 2 and extending to Tier 3 (see Table 6). Instead of utilizing the expertise of the special education teacher to assist with improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students with high-intensity needs (HIN), data from this study uncovered that school and district personnel adopted scripted intervention curricula or invested in computer-based intervention programs to meet academic and behavioral needs for students with HIN in Tier 2 and Tier 3.

The exclusion of the special education teacher from the MTSS process is also problematic. Special education teachers possess specialized knowledge and strategies to

assist a wide-variety of diverse learners access the general education curriculum. They are in a unique position to collaborate in the problem-solving structure (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005) and can work to resolve instructional concerns (Scanlon & Baker, 2012; Wang & Reynolds, 1996). In fact, Cummings and colleagues (2008) opined special education teachers were critical to the MTSS system to which they brought “value” (p. 29). Special education teacher’s expertise should be viewed as integral in supporting and supplementing core instruction to benefit all students (Cummings et al., 2008; Deshler et al., 2004).

However, this study exposed practices not only contradictory to research, but also contrary to state policy. This is one example highlighting the underutilization of the expertise of the special education teacher (Sindelar et al., 2014). Tiers 2 and 3 of the MTSS process are critical for providing students with persistent, high-intensity needs with the urgent and individually prescribed supports they required (Deshler et al., 2004; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005; Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). However, the use of scripted or computerized intervention protocols brings into question how *individualized* these supports are, as well as the effectiveness of such procedures.

In summary, inertial forces (e.g., habits, routines, customs, and practices) affected the policies and procedures during implementation of MTSS at the district and school level, which then affected the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Previously adopted habits and rituals of special education teachers in segregated settings morphed current policies and practices to replicate previous customs. Specifically, special education teachers were not utilized for their expertise in the MTSS process. Further, the general education teacher provided primary instruction and supplemental intervention, as well as

initiated referrals to special education, without expertise from special education teachers during problem-solving processes.

Technical

Technical forces “include the organizational structure and internal functioning of schools, including time and resource allocation, equipment, materials, and curriculum” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). According to Collinson and Cook (2001), “time is one of the greatest constraints to any change process, whether at the individual, classroom, or school level” (p. 1). Technical forces were evident in references to the most significant influence on their roles and responsibilities: the master schedule. Time and resource allocation aligned with the master schedule affected the roles and responsibilities of the participants in this study. Participants in this study provided supports to students across grade levels. However, most grade levels follow different schedules. Once developed by school administrators, the master schedule included the amount and blocks of time for planning, instruction, and related service provision. Participants in this study cited time as a major barrier to: (a) providing effective instruction, intervention, and supports for students on their caseloads; (b) completing paperwork (e.g., IEPs); and (c) collaborating with other professionals. Kauffman and colleagues (2016) raised the question: “how can a special educator provide instructional or behavioral support for students who need it when there are schedule conflicts (i.e., when he/she is needed in more than one place at one time)?” (p. 9).

A major concern for participants in this study was the amount of time they could provide specially-designed supports and services to students with disabilities. According to

IDEA, decisions about special education services (content, frequency, and duration) are guided by the individual needs of the student, supported with multiple forms of data, and determined by a multidisciplinary IEP team of parents, general and special education teachers, related service personnel, a knowledgeable representative of the local educational agency, and, if appropriate, the student (*IDEA*, 2004). Furthermore, the IEP must specifically establish the length, duration, and frequency of services (*IDEA*, 2004).

Participants in this study shared practices about the duration and frequency of services that raised ethical and legal concerns. For example, participants claimed that duration and frequency of services were affected by the master schedule, number of students on their caseload ($M = 22$), and the number of special education personnel. In this way, decisions made to develop the master schedule also determined how often participants entered a classroom each week, the time of day they provided supports, and the length of time they spent in the classroom. For some participants, school administrators required IEPs to reflect what they *could* provide instead of what they *should* provide based on student need. Therefore, some participants either noted that IEPs were reconsidered to reduce the duration and/or frequency of services; or engaged in strong advocacy efforts to ensure that the IEPs were not changed, citing legal compliance. Additionally, specially-designed supports and services were provided to students in groups. Students “shared” their time for services with multiple students who were enrolled in the same classroom who may have had different IEP goals. Data across participants reflected that they provided services on average to three to six students simultaneously. Providing services to multiple students simultaneously limited the individualized attention students may have required.

According to participants, the master schedule included general education teacher's classroom schedule for instruction (e.g., reading, math, science, and social studies), specials (e.g., physical education, computer, art, and music), lunch, and recess. The school's master schedule, then, affected *when* participants could provide special education services, as well as frequency and duration of the services. According to participants, they were unable to pull students for services during specific times including whole group instruction, specials, lunch, and recess. Further, school-wide testing, such as district-mandated diagnostic exams and state exams, affected the master schedule. Changes to the master schedule (e.g., testing) or changes to the general education teacher's schedule (e.g., whole class instruction taking longer than expected) affected services for students and sometimes resulted in a student not receiving the specially-designed instruction in accordance with the IEP.

Allocating time for instruction, intervention, or specially-designed supports is critical as increased instructional time may positively affect the quality of student learning (Cattaneo, Oggenfuss, & Wolter, 2016; Kruse & Kruse, 1995; Collinson & Cook, 2001). Therefore, reducing instructional time due to master schedule constraints, caseload management requirements, or limited personnel could be a cause for concern as they may raise ethical dilemmas. The importance of instructional time is affirmed through state and federal mandates. For example, *IDEA* (2004) emphasized increased time for intervention and supports. According to Harn and colleagues (2014), the MTSS framework could maximize instructional time. Tier 2 and 3 interventions are conducted using increased instructional time (e.g., additional 30 minutes-60 minutes; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007) and the increased time is important to student learning (Lignugaris/Kraft & Harris, 2014). In accordance with

state guidelines, students with disabilities may continue receive services in Tier 3 as determined by the IEP team due to the additional instructional time they may require to enable them to meet rigorous state standards (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006). Further, the interventions, supports, and increased instructional time provided within the MTSS framework before identification are sustained once eligibility is determined and continue to be provided in the LRE (FLDOE, 2016). Reduction of this time fails to provide the appropriate time necessary to improve student outcomes.

Another significant demand on participants' time was the completion of required paperwork and legal compliance. Participants claimed that paperwork was increasing and adequate time to complete paperwork was not provided. Paperwork included creating, completing, or modifying IEPs. Further, participants were responsible for writing progress reports, which accompanied report cards. Progress reports required participants to collect, analyze, and report data about students' present levels of performance and progress toward annual IEP goals. Paperwork was dependent on participants collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, which were all necessary to support decisions made and articulated on the students' IEPs. On average, participants managed 22 students on their caseloads, which had a direct impact on the amount of paperwork. Depending on how support facilitation was implemented at the school site, participants had as many as 90 students on their caseloads.

Additionally, participants were required to compile and analyze data to write IEPs for students recently evaluated and eligible for special education. However, the evaluation of students referred to special education fell under the role of the school psychologist. Since the special education teachers did not participate in evaluation, writing an IEP was a difficult

task as participants may not have had any personal knowledge of the student. To create IEPs, participants relied on data from a variety of sources including classroom-based assessments; anecdotal notes; grades from the general education teacher; evaluation reports and data from the school psychologist; and, pertinent reports from guidance counselors or social workers.

Special education teachers typically utilized a significant amount of their time completing non-instructional duties associated with their roles such as completing paperwork (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). Excessive paperwork has been cited as primary reasons special education teachers leave the field of teaching (Billingsley, 2004; Brunsting et al., 2014; Embich, 2001; Van Droogenbroek et al., 2014). Van Droogenbroek and colleagues (2014) posited that teachers who experienced autonomy and felt supported by administration were better able cope with non-instructional demands. However, data from this study indicated that teachers did not experience autonomy in their roles and lacked adequate administrative support.

Participants, even those teaching for as little as four years, previously worked in their own classrooms where they were responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing instruction, intervention, and accommodations for students with disabilities. They planned lessons, designed and implemented instructional decisions using data, and determined the best strategies to support students' access to the general education curriculum. Working in a self-contained or resource setting may have resulted in increased teacher autonomy (Cummings et al., 2008).

In 2008, Cummings and colleagues posited that the role of the special education teacher would experience significant changes due to changes in their professional

environment. Specifically, Cummings and colleagues (2008) stated the professional environment for special education teachers would move from isolation and seclusion to one of collaboration and consultation. Collaboration and communication were overarching themes that emerged in this study. Research indicated collaboration is a required skill for special education teachers who work in inclusive settings (Friend et al., 2010; Fuchs et al., 2010; Knackendoffel, 2007; Little & Crawford, 2002; McLeskey et al., 2017; Swanson et al., 2012; Tremblay, 2013). Literature has highlighted that general education and special education teachers must be prepared to implement collaborative teaching models to facilitate inclusion and provide individualized and specially-designed instruction with appropriate supports (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). An emphasis on collaboration and communication was necessary to ensure the success of all students in the classroom (McLeskey et al., 2017). However, the practice and custom of general and special education working independently of one another continued.

Participants in this study noted the potential benefits of working collaboratively to support student achievement. Yet, participants highlighted the obstacles that hindered effective collaboration. According to Friend and Cook (2017), effective collaboration is dependent on shared responsibility, parity, and collective goals. Effective collaboration requires clarity of the roles and expectations among members of the team and is largely dependent on who influences the flow and content of the interactions (McLeskey et al., 2017). To ensure a strong collaborative relationship, the districts and schools must create learning communities and emphasize the importance of collaboration (Huberman et al., 2012). Strong collaborative relationships could be built by serving on leadership teams, blending instruction

from both the general and special education teachers, and participating in PLCs (McLeskey et al., 2017). However, in this study, participants did not have shared responsibility in the decision-making, opportunity to serve in leadership positions, clearly established collective goals, fixed common planning or PLC meetings, or acknowledged parity in the classroom.

Effective collaboration is dependent upon effective communication. McLeskey and colleagues (2017) asserted, “Communication skills are key building blocks for collaboration; participants’ verbal and nonverbal skills largely define whether collaboration can occur” (p. 29). Collaboration is also dependent on administrative support, planning time, and shared teaching philosophies (Bauwens et al., 1989; Dieker, 2001; Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015; McLeskey et al., 2017; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Collaboration is fostered when administrators provide time for educators to meet face-to-face to plan instruction (McLeskey et al., 2017) something that most participants claimed as non-existent in this study. The only participants who were afforded the opportunity and time to plan with their team were those who forged those relationships. Additionally, effective collaboration is dependent on administrators “guiding them through the development of positive professional relationships, establishing explicit and implicit procedures for working together, and teaching them about school programs that rely on collaborative interactions” (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 28). Participants in this study did not describe this type of administrative support.

Data in this study reflected that participants with smaller caseloads were able to dedicate more time for the instruction, intervention, and support of students with disabilities. Further, participants with reduced caseloads had more time to collaborate with professionals

(e.g., plan, meet), including the general education teacher. Participants with smaller caseloads of students (Emily and Jasmin) entered fewer classrooms and experienced reduced demands on their time since they did not support multiple general education teachers. Reducing caseloads of special education teachers may be key to increasing the duration and frequency of supports provided to students as well as provides the much-needed time for effective collaboration.

Normative

Normative forces arise “from beliefs and values and reflect such matters as conventional conceptions of intelligence” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). Teacher assumptions and beliefs about student ability dominated participant perceptions of inclusive practices. As evidenced by interview data, several participants believed that students with disabilities were better served in a resource or self-contained setting. Further, participants exposed their beliefs about student skillsets, which often focused on student deficits, concerns about student ability to achieve grade level standards, and beliefs about students’ academic outcomes.

The normative force “dominates the contextual landscape for equity-minded change” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). One of the overarching themes in this study, *The Challenges Impacting the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting*, included tertiary themes that exposed deep-seated feelings about inclusion and beliefs about how to best provide supports and instruction for students with disabilities. Long-held beliefs

about the ability of students with disabilities shaped participants' feelings about inclusion and subsequent delivery of services and supports to students.

As acknowledged in Chapter 2, special education has a long history of excluding students with disabilities, which continued for decades. Exclusion of students with disabilities from accountability measures could be attributed to lowered expectations for their performance (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). This practice continued until accountability measures for all students, including students with disabilities, were explicitly mandated in *NCLB* (2004). After the passage of *NCLB*, *IDEIA* (2004) was amended to include provisions in which educators were expected to provide supports and services for students with disabilities to assure meaningful progress as measured by high-stakes testing (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). Their mandatory inclusion in accountability measures was deemed necessary to improve instruction and ensure access to general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible (*IDEIA*, 2004). Specifically, federal policy sought to “ensure students with disabilities access to, involvement in, and progress in a challenging general education curriculum” (Hardman & Dawson, 2008, p. 7).

Despite federal policy to ensure high expectations of students with disabilities, data in this study indicated that some participants continued to have concerns about students achieving rigorous grade level standards despite lacking mastery of some foundational skills. For example, a participant stated that she did not see a benefit in providing students with disabilities access to the grade level curriculum since “they couldn’t read the curriculum anyway”. In another example a participant stated, “that it’s hard for my kids to think deeply” and that thinking deeply was something they “can’t do”. Additionally, another participant

stated that students “can’t do any of the grade level work”. Before special education teachers can improve student outcomes, address student academic or behavioral needs, or develop student’s confidence and motivation, they must first address their own beliefs about student ability.

As evidenced in this study, concerns about student ability to achieve grade level standards along and providing access to the general education curriculum presented special education teacher participants with a dilemma. Participants in this study struggled with the best way to provide special education services and specially-designed instruction to meet individual student needs while concomitantly holding students accountable for increasingly rigorous grade level standards. Participants believed that even though there were significant academic and behavioral benefits to including students with disabilities in the general education classroom, there were many drawbacks. Participants shared concerns about the pace in the general education classroom, stating that it was too fast for students with disabilities. Participants pointed out discrepancies between grade level standards and current levels of student performance, claiming the gap was too wide to be addressed in a general education classroom. Additionally, participants focused on student deficits and this focus translated to concerns about student ability and achievement. Participants felt that it was unreasonable to expect students with disabilities to meet increasingly rigorous grade level standards. Kauffman (1999), who argued it was potentially damaging to expect all students to meet grade level standards, supported this notion.

According to Hardman and Dawson (2008), beliefs about student inability to master grade level standards affects decisions about instructional strategies to address their needs.

Hardman and Dawson (2008) argued that explicit skill instruction is an effective and widely adopted evidence-based instructional strategy that has documented success in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. However, Hardman and Dawson (2008) claimed that instructional strategies in the general education classroom stemmed from a constructivist approach to learning and often collided with explicit instruction. Data from this study supported Hardman and Dawson's (2008) claim that inclusion in the general education classroom was impacted by this struggle. Participants in this current study all stated that they pulled students to the back of the classroom to provide direct and explicit skill instruction in small group settings as non-disabled peers worked in groups or independently to practice newly acquired skills. Preventing students with disabilities from engaging in self-directed learning processes reinforced the belief that they were not able to benefit from alternate learning structures (Hardman & Dawson, 2008).

Concerns about student ability to achieve grade level standards affected student self-worth. Although participants voiced concerns about the ability of students with disabilities to achieve grade level standards, and despite their focus on student skill deficits, participants claimed a significant part of their role was to improve student mindset and motivation. According to participants, students experienced failure so often they lacked motivation and confidence in their ability to achieve at the same rate as their non-disabled peers. By emphasizing success and failure, participants may have negatively influenced student learning and interest (Arroyo et al. 2016). Low self-concept, pessimism, and lack of confidence can negatively affect student achievement outcomes (Arroyo et al., 2016).

Special and general education teachers must also change their own conversations about student ability. Huberman and colleagues (2012) found improved student outcomes when special and general education teachers “replaced conversations about how students ‘don’t get it’ with discussions about what part of the lesson they ‘didn’t get’” (Huberman et al., 2012, p. 70). In the current study, participants’ instruction and intervention was deficit driven and participants had concerns about students’ abilities to achieve grade level standards.

Study Limitations

Saturation (Creswell, 2013; O’Reilly & Parker, 2012) was achieved with this sample of seven participants from six school districts. However, there were limitations with the findings that must be mentioned. Limitations in this study included the recruitment of study participants, homogeneity of sample, participants’ level of formal education in special education, and participant districts of employment.

The first limitation in this study was the recruitment of study participants. Participants ($N = 7$) were recruited through recommendations of school leaders (Bailey, 1996; Holloway, 1997) or snowball sampling (Babie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Recommendations and snowball sampling were neither random nor representative (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The recommendations of school leaders as a form of recruitment may have affected the *representativity* of the sample (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) as those who made the recommendations may have referred or *not* referred participants for personal reasons (Groger, Mayberry, & Straker, 1999). Further, snowball sampling methods were “dependent

on the referrals of the respondents first accessed and on the willingness of the research subjects to participate” (Cohen & Arieli, 2011, p. 428) which may have affected the validity and reliability of the results. Finally, potential participants may have been more willing to participate in this study than those who chose not to participate, and this willingness may have represented participant bias (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). School leader recommendation bias and potential refusals to participate may have limited the perspectives included in this study (Groger et al., 1999).

The second limitation of this study was the homogeneity of the sample. All participants in this study were white females. No male participants participated in this study nor identified through snowball sampling methods. In the state where this study took place, there were 3,752 male special education teachers compared to 22,930 female special education teachers for the 2015-2016 school year (FLDOE, 2017). However, white females made up the largest population (16,463) of special education teachers in the state and significantly outnumbered white male counterparts (2,546) (FLDOE, 2017). Further, even though 72% of female special education teachers identified as white (FLDOE, 2017), this study did not include a sample of the population of special education teachers of other races or ethnicities.

Six of the seven participants in this study pursued or were in the process of pursuing graduate degrees in special education and one of the participants was in the process of applying to a graduate program. Therefore, six of seven participants were attending or graduated from the same university for their graduate degrees. The pursuit of an advanced degree in special education illustrated the participants’ self-awareness and desire to improve

their own skills, knowledge, and competencies to improve student outcomes. Participant self-awareness may have biased the results as participants demonstrated they were aware of what special education should have looked like versus how it was implemented in their schools. Participants attending the same university for Master's degrees are also a limitation within this study as all participants are receiving or have received the same training.

Finally, the seven participants in this study were employed in six different districts within the state. Drawing conclusions about district implementation policies and procedures for inclusive practices is difficult given participants were not all employed in the same district. Interviewing participants in the same district may provide data about district policies and procedures for implementation.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Future Research

Fuchs and colleagues (2010) anticipated a “different, distinctive, and important role for special education” in the general education setting (p. 301). According to Fuchs and colleagues (2010), the role would stem from a “blurring of special education in a new continuum of services” (p. 310) and would require the restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers who work in inclusive settings. Tremblay (2013) concurred, indicating to effectively teach students with and without disabilities to reach rigorous academic standards and goals, the roles and responsibilities of the special and general education teachers would be restructured. The results of this study confirmed and extended the anticipated changes to the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Findings from the current study indicated that all special education teacher

participants had directly experienced significant changes to their roles and responsibilities. These changes suggest multiple foci for future research and have implications for the field.

The researcher in this study provides the following recommendations and implications for future research based on the conclusions of this study. Recommendations are offered for: (a) the field of special education; (b) teachers and related professionals; (c) teacher preparation programs; and (d) the implementation of policy and procedure.

Implications for Special Education

Special education is a field that is constantly adapting to the policies and procedures stemming from legislation and litigation at both the federal and state levels. Further, special education practices are dependent on decisions made at the district and local level. Given multiple variables that affect the implementation of policies, an understanding and acknowledgement of connections between policies and procedures will support future research on the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Therefore, considering students with disabilities have varieties of academic and behavioral needs, it is important to research the best practices for the implementation of policies and procedures that influences their instruction. Classroom and instructional practices are influenced by policy, sometimes in unintended ways (Coburn et al., 2016). This is especially important as research has continually affirmed the significance of teacher quality and instructional practices and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Vernon-Dotson et al., 2014). Teachers are critical to

implementation of policies and procedures (Coburn et al., 2016; Levinson et al., 2009; Little, 2006; Spillane, 2004). Policy initiatives influence classroom teaching and student learning (Coburn et al., 2016), and these influences have implications for all stakeholders (e.g., students, families, teachers, schools). Coburn and colleagues (2016) asserted,

“understanding the effects of and mechanisms around these new reform strategies is important not only to enable us to make midcourse corrections in current policies, but also because it promises to help policymakers design future policies that better support high-quality instruction in school districts, schools, and classrooms” (p. 244).

From the rich descriptions provided in participant interviews and findings from this phenomenological study, the researcher recommends further studies be conducted to determine federal and state policy influences on the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers working in inclusive environments. In consideration of this study’s findings, researchers in the field of special education should consider the following:

1. Due to the limitations of this study (i.e., recruitment procedures, homogeneity of sample, methodology), a study that includes a greater diversity of participants should be conducted. Participants from diverse demographics, education levels, and backgrounds will ensure a greater breadth of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of special education teacher participants.
2. A study that investigates the lived experiences of special education teacher participants employed within the same district will provide a depth of roles and services.

3. A survey-based research study should be undertaken to address broader questions of roles and responsibilities across districts, states, and nationally. Researchers could recruit survey participants using a variety of databases including those provided by teacher preparation programs, state licensure and certification entities, and school human resource departments.
4. Research from qualitative and/or survey methodologies could include questions directed to gain more information on recently published high-leveraged practices, specifically collaboration and communication, implemented by special education teachers.
5. Research could be extended to focus on the framework adopted by various schools and districts to implement effective inclusive practices.
6. In this study, participants did not mention skills or knowledge related to evidence-based practices or support facilitation. Future research could include interview or survey questions about evidence-based practices, support facilitation, and implementation.
7. Research across multiple settings (e.g., self-contained, resource) could provide additional information about the knowledge and skills required that may be dependent on the setting in which special education services and supports are provided.

Implications for Teachers and Related Professionals

Findings and conclusions drawn from this study informed the following researcher recommendations for teachers and related professionals:

1. For special education teachers and general education teachers, consider building relationships to gain parity in the classroom. Building relationships could increase effectiveness of practice, lead to greater job satisfaction, and could potentially improve student outcomes. Effective collaborative relationships require all stakeholders to feel valued. Both special and general education teachers have skills and knowledge of effective strategies to improve student learning. As such, educators should share their skills and knowledge with each other to improve student outcomes and improve working relationships.
2. For special and general educators to share the responsibility of students with disabilities, consideration should be given to providing teacher preparation and continued professional development relating to: (a) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to support differentiation of instruction; (b) services and supports for students with disabilities through integrated application of acquired skills and knowledge; and (c) meaningful collaboration across stakeholders. Access to professional development that prepares all educators to work with a diverse population of students is crucial for closing achievement gaps, improving student outcomes, and reducing referrals to special education. Further, due to the critical role the MTSS framework provides for struggling students, all educators would

benefit from extensive training in providing individualized instruction and intervention.

3. For administrators, to create an inclusive school culture that values all stakeholders, consider providing professional development opportunities to both special and general education teachers relating to: (a) providing accommodations; (b) supporting academic and behavior needs; and (c) and compliance with special education laws, policies, and procedures.
4. Administrators should consider ways to alleviate constraints from the master schedule, which affects caseload management, time permitted to provide legally mandated supports to students with disabilities, and common planning time (which could promote parity among general and special education teachers).

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

To prepare future teachers to work in inclusive environments that require increased collaboration and communication, we must look at the structure and organization of teacher preparation programs. The following researcher recommendations for teacher preparation programs are provided and based upon findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Teacher preparation for inclusive programming requires a more integrated approach to the preparation of special and general education teachers. Both special and general education teachers would benefit from an integrated model that considers all students within a holistic lens. Special education teachers need to develop skills related to supporting students with disabilities achieve rigorous

state standards through enhanced content area knowledge (Leko et al., 2015).

Similarly, general education teachers would benefit from acquiring knowledge and skills related to evidence-based instructional strategies and best practices for meeting the needs of diverse learners (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005; Fuchs et al., 2008). Therefore, teacher preparation would benefit from an integrated approach designed to provide *all* teachers with the ability to meet diverse student needs given the focus on accountability and increasing rigor of grade level standards (Leko et al., 2015).

2. Special education and general education preparation programs could benefit from a collaborative approach to teacher preparation to ensure that all graduates enter the pre-K-12 setting ready to provide instruction, intervention, supports, and services to students with a range of learning needs. Special education and general education at all levels, including teacher preparation, can no longer operate in silos if core principles of *IDEA* are to be realized.
3. Teacher preparation programs should provide pre-service and in-service special education teachers with professional development to enable to manage and prioritize multiple roles and responsibilities.
4. Teacher preparation programs should focus on the development of skills for effective collaboration and communication with a variety of professionals. Education professionals across content areas and grade levels must be prepared to work with multiple educational professionals (e.g., district personnel, administrators, related services personnel, teachers, school psychologists,

guidance counselors, resource officers, staffing specialists, social workers), parents, and students to improve academic outcomes. Collaboration should be included in all courses, beginning with lesson plan design and extending implementation of instruction and practices that support students' academic and behavioral needs.

5. Special and general education teacher preparation programs should consider providing skills and knowledge related to assessment, data collection, and data interpretation. Further, skills related to data-based decision-making should provide teacher candidates with the ability to apply and practice their newly acquired skills. The application and implementation of data-based skills will enable teacher candidates to enact both on-the-spot and long-term changes to instruction and intervention to address the immediate and unique needs of a diverse body of students.
6. Special education teacher preparation must prepare teacher candidates with content area knowledge. Special education teachers must have experience with and knowledge of content area as students with disabilities work towards mastery of grade level standards. As Leko and colleagues (2015) asserted, special education teachers “need to have extensive knowledge of how to support students with disabilities in achieving rigorous content standards” (p. 26). To maximize this support, special education teachers must possess the content area knowledge necessary to support students.

7. Special and general education programs should consider including UDL principles throughout courses that prepares teachers to meet a variety of learning needs. It is recommended that all teachers be prepared to meet the needs of a diverse population of students with varying abilities and needs. Further, preparation programs should provide teachers with a toolkit that includes a variety of instructional strategies so teachers can teach the way students learn.

Implications for the Implementation of Policy and Procedure

The implementation of policies and procedures for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum is part of school reform initiatives. If schools are to fully implement inclusive practices aligned with federal and state mandates in which special and general education teachers share the responsibility of students with disabilities, then there must be a restructuring of organizational systems within schools. Since the 1980s (Stainback et al., 1989; Will, 1986), there has been a call for a more unified approach to educating students with disabilities that integrates special and general education, beginning with teacher preparation and continuing to the allocation of resources within schools and across the roles and responsibilities of educators. However, special education and general education have continued to operate largely independent of one another and teachers are facing increased role ambiguity due to competing forces across structural and organizational constraints. The development of educational policy often remains disconnected from the implementation of the policy itself (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 2017). This disconnect often leads to role ambiguity for those responsible for its implementation.

Policy and procedure are often implemented in ways that serve to only adopt surface-level changes rather than the required more significant structural changes (Coburn et al., 2016). Further, Coburn and colleagues (2016) affirmed the significance of organizational and individual capacity in the implementation of policy and procedure. Therefore, the following recommendations are offered for the implementation of inclusive practices by schools and districts:

1. Provide appropriate preparation to all professionals charged with the development, administration, and implementation of policies and procedures related to inclusive practices. Implementation is affected by the related knowledge and skills of those charged with its implementation (Coburn et al., 2016). Multiple professionals at multiple organizational levels are responsible for adhering to provisions within federal and state legislation (e.g., *IDEA*, *ESSA*) and they must be versed in the legislation in addition to its implications for practice. In this study, the support facilitation framework was adopted by the participants' districts in response to policy stemming from inclusive practice provisions within federal and state legislation. Enhanced professional development related to support facilitation would be beneficial at the district and school level, and should be extended to include all professionals who work within the framework (e.g., special educators, general educators, administrators, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals).
2. Provide professional development at all organizational levels of policy implementation. The implementation of inclusive practices requires continued and sustained professional development for administrators, district officials, and

- classroom-based professionals. Professional development should be sensitive to the needs of the teachers who directly implement the policies and procedures.
3. Provide professional development to address beliefs held by those who implement policy and procedure. The implementation of policy and procedure is influenced by and dependent on the beliefs held by teachers and administrators (Spillane, 2004). Therefore, providing professional development that addresses these beliefs may be beneficial.
 4. Clarify and clearly define the roles of all professionals (e.g., special and general education teachers) involved in the implementation of policy and procedure related to inclusive practices (e.g., support facilitation). Without clearly defined roles, there will be a sense of role ambiguity that affects the ability of teachers to effectively do their jobs.
 5. Adopt evaluative procedures designed to assess progress of policy and procedure implementation and address issues that may arise to improve systems. Coburn and colleagues (2016) asserted that the implementation of policy and procedure needs to build on learned lessons from previous implementations of policy and procedure. In this study, issues arose from technical forces (Welner, 2001) related to the adherence of a master schedule. The master schedule affected special education services provided to students and impeded the ability of teachers to collaborate. Providing appropriate supports to students in an inclusive environment is a complex task (Florida Inclusion Network [FIN], 2017). Since scheduling of services has been identified as a problem area, there needs to be a system in place that exposes this

- consequence and provides a solution to address the problem. In this case, consideration could be extended to inclusive scheduling. Inclusive scheduling considers the student with disabilities first and requires a collaborative approach between the special and general education teachers, administrators, and others school professionals (FIN, 2017) to create a master schedule responsive to student need.
6. Allocate the appropriate and required resources to fully execute policies and procedures. Resources may include time, money, and personnel.

Conclusion

In this study, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided specially-designed instruction and special education supports in the general education classroom. As noted in the literature, the number of students with disabilities receiving special education services in the general education classroom increased over the last decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This increase led to a new and dynamic role for special education teachers who worked in inclusive settings (Cummings et al., 2008; Fuchs et al., 2010). The emphasis on service delivery shifted the interpretation of special education from a “place” to a “set of services” (Prasse, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, special education teachers working in inclusive settings had to rethink their roles (McLeskey et al., 2011) and restructure their approach to providing specially-designed services.

As Brownell and colleagues (2010) asserted, there are changes in “how special education is organized and conceptualized” (p. 357). These changes have brought about a

lack of clarity of the role of the special education teacher, which stemmed from the interpretation and implementation of laws and policies governing their instruction, intervention, and services (Spillane, 2004; Welner, 2001). The allocation of resources (e.g., time, personnel) contributed to role confusion and ambiguity (Billingsley et al., 2014; Billingsley et al., 2009, Rock et al., 2016). Further, the change in the special education teachers' roles and responsibilities has implications for teacher preparation at both the preservice and professional development levels as educators continue to enhance their knowledge base and performance skills to address the unique needs of their students (Shepherd et al., 2016).

This study exposed the multiple facets of school and district policies and practices that directly affected special educator's roles and responsibilities, as well as the emergence of a new role as a support facilitator. The support facilitation framework was adopted under the auspices it would provide schools and districts with the ability to administer specially-designed instruction and services to multiple students across multiple grade levels while employing a limited amount of personnel. However, as Kauffman and colleagues (2016) questioned, "is it reasonable to expect a special educator to plan appropriate, individualized, targeted instructional support for several students at the same time" (p. 9)? Although special education teachers attempted to provide the required specially-designed instruction and services across grade levels, the limited number of employees hindered the services and limited allocation of time to provide supports. Within this framework, schools and districts circumvented requirements for teachers to hold dual certification in both content and special education by adopting the support facilitation model. However, despite the increased

communication with school-based professionals, special education teachers continued to feel isolated.

This framework did not support collaboration built through relationships in which the special education teacher would experience parity and value. The lack of time for collaboration and lack of professional development on effective collaboration structures contributed to special education teachers having little parity with their general education colleagues. Administrators created the master schedule based on their perceived needs. These needs did not include common planning time or time for special education teachers to attend team meetings (e.g., PLCs, department meetings). Educators, especially special education teachers, must advocate for instructional needs when the master schedule is being developed. Special education teachers can provide administrators with more knowledge about their needs and the needs of their students so they can be taken into consideration. Due to the lack of parity, special education teachers often assumed the role of an assistant and were not utilized to their full potential especially since they had technical skills and knowledge directly aligned with diverse learning needs. Additionally, this framework left special education teachers questioning their ability to facilitate inclusive practices that directly improved student outcomes.

The researcher in this study: (a) contributed to the literature on the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher working in inclusive settings; (b) provided a foundation for research on the skills and knowledge needed by special education teachers; and (c) initiated research on the role of the special education teacher who works in a support-based framework. As the field of special education continues to respond to trends in

legislation and policies, the role of the special education teacher will undoubtedly continue to evolve. Teacher preparation programs and professional development must reflect these changes to ensure special education teachers acquire the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Dena Slanda**

Date: **November 18, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/18/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	A qualitative inquiry on the changing roles of special education teachers
Investigator:	Dena Slanda
IRB Number:	SBE-16-12675
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kamille Chaparro".

Signature applied by Kamille Chaparro on 11/18/2016 08:16:49 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: A qualitative inquiry on the changing roles of special education teachers

Principal Investigator: Dena Slanda, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Supervisor: Mary E. Little, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- This research projects seeks to answer the following questions:
 - What are the lived experiences of special education teachers who are involved in the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) process in urban elementary schools?
 - What meanings do these participants make of their experience with MTSS?
- Participate in an interview and answer a few demographic questions. The study will take place in a setting of your choosing or via Adobe Connect (or through other similar videoconferencing software).
- The expected duration of the interviews will be one hour and will take place during the 2016-2017 school year.
- A follow-up interview will take place as part of the member-checking process in qualitative data analysis. This follow-up interview will be conducted to clarify participant's responses and elicit further response if needed. This follow up interview will take approximately 10-30 minutes.
- Video recording will occur via camcorder or via Adobe Connect (or similar videoconferencing software) for each session. No students will be video recorded and all sessions will be password protected. Video that is considered for use in sharing processes in the form of blogs, articles or other venues of publication will be vetted and signed off for use by you prior to use. If you do not want to be video recorded during your interview, the researcher will turn off the recording system. All video recordings not signed for use in publications or future teacher professional development will be destroyed one year after the conclusion of the study.
- Any tapes that the researcher would like to share will only be used with your written expressed permission, and no school or student names or information will be a part of any video that is shared.

You must be 18 years of age or older, have certification in Exceptional Student Education, be an employee at the school site, have served a minimum of two years teaching and have teaching responsibilities (including direct instruction and/or student support in the general education classroom) to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Dena Slanda, Doctoral Candidate at 407-227-6663 or by email dena@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Mary E. Little, Faculty Supervisor at 407-823-3275 or by email at mary.little@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX C: BRACKETING INTERVIEW



Order

Client	Dena Slanda
Ref #	Slanda Dissertation Interviews V1
Order #	TC0523956995

Alex Davies: All right, so this is, uh, [bracketing 00:00:02], bracketing interview for Dena Dillenseger Slanda's dissertation. Um, my name is Alex Davies. I am the interviewer, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida in the TESOL track. Um, today is December 6th, uh, 200 ... '16, and um, it is about eight o'clock in the morning, and we are in Lake Mary. Okay, so for the first question, Dena-

Dena Slanda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alex Davies: Um, please explain your educational background.

Dena Slanda: So my background in education, um, started with me coming in as an alternate route. My bachelor's degree is in government, international politics, and I minored in history. And um, I got into education when my kids started school, and started volunteering in the classroom and doing things at that level, at the pre-school level, and then I kind of moved up as they moved up. I was always on the PTA, um, but it was more informal.

I decided to go back to school, so I entered through Valencia's Educational Preparatory Institute, um, where I took seven courses, 21 credit hours, towards getting my degree. Um, since I already had my bachelor's, I just had to do that, and it ... Once I was done with that, I realized, um, there were so many students that I ... During my observations, that really needed intensive interventions with reading.

So reading really became ... I took a literacy course at Valencia, um, and reading became kind of my specialty, where that ... I ... And I knew kids struggled in that area. So at the same time that I was doing the EPI program, I had gotten a long-term substitute job, because I had my temporary teaching certificate, and I got a long-term substitute job at Indian Trails Middle School. Um, and I was teaching science and technology, um, and I had been, prior to that, substituting since 2010, off and on, just taking any jobs anywhere in the K-12, which gave me a better understanding of how things work at the K lev ... You know, kindergarten, first, second grade, and then all the way up through high school.

And I appreciated those experiences, because I understood then a greater need of what was happening in kindergarten, first and second grade with reading, and then what were those implications when they got to the higher grade levels? Um, so I substitute taught for several months, and then I got my long-term sub job as a science and technology teacher, and I was project-based learning, hands-on. We blew up rocket ships. We, um, did

CO2 cars. We did a lot of hands-on work, but I realized that some of my students weren't reading at where they should be reading.

Um, it was an elective course, but it was science-based, and I aligned ... It was interdisciplinary, so I aligned it with what they were learning in their actual science, core instruction science course. Um (clear throat), but students that struggled with reading weren't able to understand a lot of what I was teaching. So, after teaching that for, um ... I started in April and taught to the end of the school year, and then came back and taught a whole full fall semester, um, I was offered a position as a reading teacher.

Um, and the reading class that I taught was meant for students ... It was an intensive reading course at the middle school level. Um, I taught several different sections, um, where I had sixth graders, I had seventh graders, I had eighth graders, and then I had one mixed course of sixth through eighth graders. Um, they were all intensive reading. They were all students who had scored either a level one or a level two on the old Florida diagnostic test, the FCAT. And they, a lot of them were smart, but just didn't ... Lacked the reading skills that they needed.

Um, a significant portion of my students were students with disabilities, but a lot of them were also considered at-risk students. So they were receiving, under Florida law, this was considered their tier two intervention, was um, because they scored a level one or two on FCAT, they had to be placed into a reading course, and that reading course was what I taught, essentially.

So um, these students would get an extra ... They would ... They gave up an elective, so at the middle school they would have three electives, but now they only had two if they were in my course. Um, a lot of them struggled in math as well, because as we know, math is becoming more reading-based, so they struggled in math and they were also in an extra math class, which means now they gave up another elective, and a lot of them had maybe one elective instead of two.

There was a, um, combo class that I taught of sixth through eighth graders, that were highly at risk, whose oral reading fluency scores were really low, and they were placed in my double reading block. So, they had zero electives and then they saw me twice a day, two periods back-to-back. So it was ... So that's kind of my educational background.

I got my master's, um, I was doing my master's while I was teaching. Um, started when I was teaching the uh, long-term substitute teaching, and then that continued and I graduated in 2013, um, from that, and then I started my doctoral program in special education in 2014. And my focus on special education was because, um, we learned strategies and instructional

methods in special education, that were universal to all students. So for my students that were at-risk and my students with disabilities, I could help them.

Um, and often times when they got to the middle school level or high school level, if they had not already been identified as a student with a disability, they probably weren't going to be, at this point, even though they might have actually had a disability. Um, they might have had a processing issue. They might have had, um, you know, just a dis ... Somewhere in that SLD-specific learning disability category, is where they would have fallen. Um, so the idea was for me to ... To step in and ... And provide those intensive interventions to the students.

Alex Davies: Um, describe ... Please describe your current research on inclusive practices, and any job-related work.

Dena Slanda: So, I think this is really important for me to, one, show that while I was teaching, um, I also sat on the MTSS committee at my school, um, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and the way that that worked was, we would meet once a month, and we would talk about various students. We'd start at the top of the alphabet and work our way down, and we would simply say, "This person needs to be tier two, this person needs to be tier one, this person's tier three."

And it was based on their grades, not so much progress monitoring. It wasn't based on how I learned MTSS should work. Um, so at my ... My current research at the University of Central Florida, I work, um, on two federally-funded grants. Um, both of them are from the Office of Special Education Preparation, um, OSEP, and the one that's most related to this is the Preparation of Intensive Interventionists.

So, we prepare ... It's called the Bridges program, and it's under the advisement of Drs. Little and Dr. Pearl. They're co-, um, principle investigators on that, and the idea is for us to prepare master's or graduate level students or scholars (clears throat) to meet intensive interventions for their students. And in this course, they take a math course, they take a reading course, they take a um behavior course, and then they also take a ... A psych education course.

So they get interdisciplinary, which is really nice, because we know that students that struggle in one area possibly struggle in other areas, so to give them that broad interventions. Um, our students range from working with K through 12 students ... Um, our scholars work with K through 12 students, so some of our people are at the secondary level, some are at elementary. My experience (clears throat) other than as a volunteer has always been at

the secondary, so I understand secondary a little bit more, and I believe that there is a huge difference between secondary and um elementary, and the skills and knowledge that they need to have at each one of those levels.

The other (clears throat) grant that I work on that's federally funded is the um, what do you call it, the NUSELI program, the National Special Education Leadership Initiative program ... Urban Special Education. And that program is interesting in the fact that we prepare doctoral level EdD students, um, to be inclusive in their practices at the leadership level, so we're thinking about administrators, superintendents, um, district people, so really assistant principals, people that are in a leadership position that can actually change the school culture about inclusive practices, and help ... Helping and providing supports for students with disabilities.

Um, I also work on another grant that's not federally funded, but it is a grant through the Florida Department of Education on inclusive practices, where at the um undergraduate level, we have worked with elementary ed, science ed, um, math ed and social studies education to um, kind of revamp those course to include um teaching strategies, and having their students, their undergrad, their pre-service students, learn how to be responsive to all students in their classroom, whether they have disabilities or don't have disabilities.

In their teacher work sample, for example, they have, um, they have to bring in, how would you adapt this or make accommodations for students with disabilities? Much like we've done with our ESOL course, where it's infused throughout their coursework and it's not just taking one course, um, which most of our elementary ed or science ed take EEX 4070, and that's the only exposure that they get to special education.

The idea for this grant was to kind of litter it ... I ... I don't like the word "litter," but to kind of throw it in and infuse it throughout the programs, um, or throughout the courses and into the syllabi and into different ... Not just the teacher work sample, but your lesson plans, and ... And making it much more meaningful as to how are you, and ... Because now we have students with disabilities in all of our courses ... How are you as a pre-service teacher going to meet the needs of a diverse population of students within your classroom?

So, those are the grants and research that I've been working on primarily while at the university. Um, I've helped with interns who have worked in a setting where they have students with and without disabilities, and meeting the needs of those students, um, helping them re-work their teacher samples, or having them re-work their lesson plans, or not re-work, but um

(clears throat) enhance those lesson plans to include, uh, strategies for students with disabilities.

Alex Davies: Um, describe your experiences working in the school system.

Dena Slanda: So, working in the school system, it's really interesting. Um, I ... I have a ... A heart and a passion for special education, however, I was a general education teacher. But as a general education teacher, um, I was providing tier two instruction, like I said, for my reading students. But I realized that students with and without disabilities needed extra supports, and I needed to be well-versed in, how do I provide those supports for our students? Because if I'm not in a position to provide those supports, then um, I think I'm not ... I'm ... I'm doing my students a disservice.

Um, they need a different way, and ... And it really made me a reflective teacher, of going back, "Okay, what do I need to do to help these students? How can I change my teaching to help these students?" There was a constant reflection, a constant, "Let me tweak a few things here and there to help my students learn." There was a lot of group-based learning. There was a lot of one-on-one instruction, um, but really meeting the needs of my students, and then finding their strengths and working up on their strengths.

So, my work in the school system, um, came from a general education teacher's standpoint, but was really working in a collaborative environment with our special education teachers to better my own teaching, and then to provide supports for students with and without disabilities, that were educated in my classroom.

Um, and like I had said, I was on the MTSS committee. I was on the literacy committee, so looking at not just, "What do I do in my classroom as a teacher?" but "What can we do school-wide to make changes?" Um, a lot of my instruction too, I had, uh, I've worked very hard on trying to get my students to generalize skills that they learned in my class, and apply those to their core content area of courses as well.

Alex Davies: Okay. Um, this is not actually on the list, but-

Dena Slanda: Okay.

Alex Davies: Going back to ... Going back, I guess, talking about your ... Just working in the school system, and then you talked about going back to Valencia to get, um, pursue the certification-

Dena Slanda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alex Davies: For teaching and whatnot, did you ... Did you take any specific, um, special education course at Valencia that was ... Like, when you were saying at ... At UCF, in the work that you do-

Dena Slanda: Right.

Alex Davies: Not just infused, um, not just the infusion model, but some kind of course that was specifically designed for the sole purpose and objective of special education?

Dena Slanda: That's a great question. I think I have to go back and look. I know that we brought up different learning styles, and we brought up different strategies. We did talk about students with disabilities. Um, out of the seven courses that I took, I don't know if one was specifically aimed at helping students with disabilities, but where I got a lot of information about helping students with disabilities was in my reading course that was required at Valencia.

So, we had to take a reading course, and in that course we learned a lot about diff ... Different disabilities, and their struggles, um, with meeting reading-based objectives, so I don't know if that qualifies. I would have to look. That's a really good question, because I ... That was so long ... It really wasn't that long ago, but it was, you know, seven ... Almost seven years ago that I took these courses, so I ... I don't remember specifically if there was one.

I know there was a behavior course. I know there was a reading course, a technology course, but um, it ... A lot of it was, how do we help students across the board all be successful? So I don't know if any one was just specific to students with disabilities, but it was ... It was inclusive, um, but I don't know if it was like EEX 4070, like you were saying.

Alex Davies: Okay.

Dena Slanda: That's a really good question.

Alex Davies: And then an ... Um, another additional question would be, um, during your time at the school, um, did you have any professional development, or did the school offer any professional development? Did you do any county workshops, um, regarding special education? I know that you said that you got MTSS training.

Dena Slanda: Right, but that's a really good question, so my MTSS training did not come from professional development through the school. Um, my MTSS training came from what I was learning in, like for example, one of the courses that I took at UCF was EEX 6507 or something, where we learned a lot about RTI. I

got an RTI certificate through that. I took a four-hour course through the Department of Education, was one of our assignments for the class.

Um, I learned about MTSS throughout my master's program. Um, because I was a general education teacher, I was not ever sent to special education professional development. So, it was something that was separate, something that was meant for um, teachers that ... That were special ... Actual special educators, and paid from the special education pot within the school. Since I was paid as a general education teacher, I ... My principal chose not to send us to those types of things, but we were sent to, um, different professional development that was more, how do we differentiate instruction? I remember taking a professional development on that.

Um, I did professional development on reading, and different ... So, we used the ... What we ... What's from uh, SFA, the Success For All program, and the Reading Edge program, and we used Reading Edge 2.0, so a lot of my professional development was reading-based. And within that, they talked about strategies, not necessarily students with disabilities; I don't remember them ever ... But ... But saying, "Hey, this works for everyone, including students with disabilities, but our focus is on at-risk students, not necessarily students with disabilities."

Alex Davies: Okay, um, and then the last additional question-

Dena Slanda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alex Davies: Um, can you describe any of, like interactions or um collaborations that you have had as a K-12 teacher, um, as a ... As a reading teacher, or even when you were doing the long-term subbing-

Dena Slanda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alex Davies: For the science, um, any collaborations or interactions that you have had with specifically ES ... ESE teachers?

Dena Slanda: So, specifically with um, teachers, uh, for the ... With the ... For the ESE teachers within the school that I was working at, um, our school was, um, segregated for students with disabilities, even mild disabilities, students with specific learning disorders, they were all taught in segregated classroom settings, up until I started with the school in 2010-2011, um, and that continued into the 2012 school year.

And at that point they said, "Okay, disperse. We're going to have all of our students with disabilities sent into inclusive settings," and that was pretty much it. Um, there was no training for general education teachers on how

to work with students with disabilities. There ... To my knowledge, I don't know what kind of training our special education teachers received to be able to go out and provide supports now outside of their classroom.

Um, one of the teachers that I won't name, um, that was next door to me ... So, I was in a classroom, because everything was segregated, we had, across from the media center, that entire row of probably 10 classrooms were all special education classrooms. So they, at the time, when I say "segregated," we were literally in a different building and in a different spot, and those students never left that building unless they went to the cafeteria. You know, our students with disabilities never left the building, unless they went to the cafeteria.

That area still remains 'til this day, where we have our, um, segregated or self-contained classrooms. Um, but so next door to me, and I was the only reading teacher that was put in that spot, and I think it was lack of space anywhere else, so my students ... Which is unfortunate, but that's kind of how it worked, so they came to me.

What was nice is, I had a special education teacher right next door to me that was in a support facilitation role. So often times, her and I would talk. We would collaborate. We shared common students, where I could ask her questions, and she had taught ... Um, when she was teaching in a self-contained setting, she taught, um, the reading program, so she was familiar with my reading program, and she had taught, um ... She was a language arts teacher, and she was certified language arts.

So it was really nice to be able to lean on her, and to ask her questions, and she had actually graduated from UCF and received her master's degree from UCF. Um, but just ... And then every other classroom next to me was self-contained. At the very end of my hall was another, um, exceptional student education teacher, another ESE teacher, who was also responsible for going out and providing supports in the, um, classrooms as well. She was the support facilitator, who had also been self-contained reading and self-contained, um, language arts.

On my wing was also a math teacher, and we also shared several students that had disabilities, or students that were considered at-risk. I taught tier two reading, he taught tier two math, so we collaborated often about students, and identified different struggles that they were having to see if we could work together on them. Um, but the collaborations were informal. They were not provided for by the administration. It wasn't like they said, "Hey, this is collaboration time."

When I did my PLCs, our ESE teachers were invited to our PLCs, but they ... Only if they taught reading. If they did not teach reading ... So, our math ESE teacher would never have come to our ... Our classroom, or to our PLC. Um, and I never went to an ESE PLC. Um, I was one of the few general education teachers that went to every IEP meeting. I made a point of going to IEP meetings. A lot of our general education teachers did what I refer to as um, drive-bys. They would come in, they would sign the paperwork, they would provide their feedback, and then they would leave.

But I think a lot of that has to do with, you've got eight teachers often times, or seven teachers sitting around during a parent/teacher conference, or during an IEP meeting, so they would come in and they would provide what they knew, and their ... Share their experiences with the student, and then leave from there. Um, but it wasn't ... It wasn't as collaborative as it could have been had we been provided with um, different supports, um, to be able to do it, like common sharing, planning time, that type of stuff, so ... But that was my experience with collaboration.

Alex Davies: Okay, um, describe your experiences within the MTSS framework.

Dena Slanda: So within MTSS, again, I was a tier two MTSS teacher, so I um, provided tier two supports. Some of my students were receiving special education services. Um, because I was a reading teacher and I had my reading endorsement, I did not have a support facilitator, and none of the reading courses had support facilitators in them, so some of my students received support facilitation, but never in a reading class. They would receive their support facilitation, um, in their language arts class, in their math class, um, in their history class or one of their other core subject courses, but not in their reading course.

The way that the state identified our course actually was as an elective, so we had elective coding, um, and when you have an elective coding, you don't receive support facilitation in your courses. So students may have, um, needed tier three instruction in my course, and I did my best to provide them with that tier three instruction, but because I worked at secondary, it was a very different setting, where very ... We're ... We're dictated by the master schedule, so the times that I could provide ... So, there was always that whole group instruction and then um, group ... You know, small group instruction, but it was very difficult to find time to provide one-on-one instruction, unless I was taking them from lunch or providing after-school, um, services.

I did teach, um, or tutored, after school, um, for students with disabilities. It was a state funded, and our school received extra monies for it, and I was paid as a tutor for students with disabilities, twice a week from 4 to 5:30.

And the idea was, uh, simply test prep. We were preparing them for the FCAT, and that's how it was done, but it was progress monitoring, so it followed a lot of the same principles as MTSS, but um, transportation was not provided.

So oftentimes, a lot of students might have started with it and not been able to keep it up, because it was very difficult for parents to stay, um, and ... Or pick up their children. The other thing was, is a lot of my students didn't have any electives, so they're in courses all day, and then now we're expecting them to stay after school for an extra hour and a half. Um, but that ... That was one way that we could provide supports.

Um, interventions; a lot of my students were taken twice a week, uh, um (clears throat), for interventions, where they were taken out of their courses ... Or sorry, not out of their courses, out of their lunch. Um, they have a 30-minute lunch, and they were taken for 20 minutes to do intensive interventions with them. Um, but it wasn't subject-specific, um, and it was twice a week, and it was mandatory for these students.

And a lot of times, the support that they received was more of checking their planners, um, looking through their grades, making them understand their grades, but I don't recall actual interventions being provided for these students to help them understand the material or further their ... Their understanding of what they were learning.

Alex Davies: Yeah, okay. Um, describe your role and responsibilities as a teacher.

Dena Slanda: So as a teacher, my um, my roles and responsibilities included making sure that even though I did not write any IEPs, that I was following IEPs. That was, I think, one of the most important things that I could do for my students. Um, the other thing that I did for my students that I think was really important was making sure that I knew different strategies and different ways, instructional, um, approaches to help students that were at risk, who have historically had trouble with reading skills, be able to start grasping different ideas.

Um, I taught, uh, like I said, tier two. Um, most of my students were, uh ... Well, not most, all of my students were tier one or tier two on ... On FCAT. The first year that I taught the intensive reading class, I actually had what they also refer to as an enrichment, and these kids were, um, tier two but they were level three on FCAT. So technically, they were proficient, but um ... And they ... They were put into a reading class because they needed those extra supports, and they were what we referred to as our hot list kids.

So these students were so close to making learning gains and going into a level four or into level five, that we wanted to provide those supports for them, to be able to kind of push them and hoist them. Once they took that away and they stopped doing tier three, um, I'm assuming because of budget ... Or, not tier three, but level three on FCAT, um, I'm assuming for budget cuts but I could be wrong, but we only started doing tier one/tier two.

And, then what we did for tier two is, we identified our hot list kids that were so close to that two/three mark, that we wanted to push them into the three so they could become proficient, and then no longer need the reading interventions that they were receiving.

The reading interventions that they received if they were a level three on FCAT were only for a semester, versus students who were at the tier one or tier two needed to have, by law, um, the entire year of reading. So um, but my roles and responsibilities, like I said, following IEPs, attending parent/teacher conferences, reaching out to parents, working collaboratively with parents, working collaboratively, um, on my own accord with other teachers. Often times if I saw certain issues with students, I would reach out to their other teachers with an e-mail or face-to-face and say, "Hey, are you seeing this in your course?"

I'm ... Or, "I'm working on the following skill." Um, "We're really working on, um, you know, different ... Being able to really navigate their way through a textbook, so since we're doing that in my course, I'm teaching them certain strategies. Would you be open to, um, you know, rewarding them in your course for using those same strategies? I know if they come back to me and show me that they are, then I'm rewarding them."

So, trying to make other teachers aware, um, of the different strategies that I'm teaching, so that way they can recognize those in their courses, because I thought that it would be helpful to everybody. I did provide some professional development on reading as a whole. Um, "Here's what we're doing in our reading courses." That ... That way, everybody in the school was aware of what was happening.

Um, reciprocal teaching was a big strategy that I used, um, and very helpful to students with and without disabilities, and at-risk students, so being able to provide professional development on that, being able to um, really speak to what ... What are our needs, um, for our students? And then extending my reach outside of the classroom, like I said, being on the literacy committee, being on the MTSS committee and looking, "Okay, these aren't just my little kiddos, but let's look at school-wide kiddos. How are we improving literacy outcomes, um, through our school improvement plan?"

How are we, you know, improving our, you know, outcomes for students at risk? How are we ... Whether it's in reading or math or otherwise, what are we doing to provide supports for these students?"

Working with administration, so I would say collaboration was a big piece of what I did. Um, even though it wasn't required, it's what I did. (laughs) Um, grading; that's part of my roles and responsibilities. Error analyzing, you know, a lot of what I did was looking and seeing, how did the students answer? Why did they answer that way? And then, can I go back and fix that way of thinking? Preparing lesson plans, working within my PLCs, so looking at the reading instruction as a whole; we all taught reading, so we would share resources, we would share ideas, we would share strategies, "Here's what I did."

Um, you know, "This was a very hard ... Difficult unit to teach. Here's how I taught it, what did ...?" You know, those types of things; I'm trying to think of what else we did as ... As teachers that were, um, daily roles and responsibilities, but ... Preparation was a huge part of it. Really knowing my books inside-out, knowing my students inside-out, um, reaching out to parents, positive and negative, um, especially for my students that were at-risk. Those positive outreaches were really helpful, and big motivators.

Finding different ways to motivate students was a big piece of what I did (laughs), you know, just um ... But you know, grading, preparing, inputting grades, contacting parents, collaborating with school, um, other school professionals, working with even like speech and language pathologists. A lot of my students were in speech and language. They could not legally be taken from a reading course to go into speech and language, but I wanted to know ... Again, not required, but what are ... What are you working on in speech and language? Because their language development is going to affect my, um, my reading development.

So I wanted to make sure, because when we're thinking of literacy, I think about speaking, reading, writing and listening. Those are all included in literacy, so looking at it as a holistic approach versus just the reading component, um, but your typical roles and responsibilities. I was only responsible for the students that were in my classroom at any given time, so um, I didn't have case loads. I didn't have anything like that. I didn't follow students outside of my classroom, um, to see what they were doing anywhere else. Um, and all of my students were mainstreamed, just ... Um, and taught in general education courses, least restrictive environment, um, that's it.

Alex Davies:

All righty.

Dena Slanda: All right.

Alex Davies: That concludes the interview.

Dena Slanda: Thank you.

Alex: Hey.

Dana: Hey. It's already set to record, so just so that you know we are currently being recorded.

Alex: Okay. Fantastic.

Dana: All right, perfect. Um, so you want to go ahead and get started?

Alex: Yeah, because we only ... Yeah with the 40 minutes, yeah, I think we should. Okay. So, are you ready?

Dana: I am.

Alex: Fantastic. Let me pull up the questioning. Move you to the side. All right. I'll e-finish your hair. (laughter)

Dana: (laughter)

Alex: Okay, um, so this is, um, [Racketing 00:55] interview with Dena Dillenseger Slanda, for her doctoral candidacy in terms of the dissertation. Um, it is December 6, 2016 still. And, um, again I am the or- ... I am the original first interview, Alex Davies, and I am a doctoral candidate in [TSAW 01:15] for, um, ECR. Okay, so continuing the interview, uh, what are your thoughts of MTSS?

Dana: Um, my thoughts on MTSS, um, stem from my own experiences with its implementation, and just various things that I've seen from my research and from my work. Um, MTSS, I think purports to solve a lot of problems, um, as far as disproportionality with an exceptional student in education, as far as, um, you know, identification, eligibility requirements, those types of things, providing supports to students prior to them experiencing failure perhaps. Um, there's a lot of different things that, uh, MTSS can solve, or attempt to solve. At the same time, I think that the way that it's implemented, or it's interpretation by various people affects how it's implemented. So depending on the resources availa- ... Available to our administrators, um, depending on the school culture, depending on the administrator's feelings towards inclusion, um, all can affect how MTSS is implemented.

Um, understanding how it needs to be implemented. I think it's ... I had said before that MTSS is implemented differently whether it's at the elementary level or the secondary level, and a lot of that comes from maybe the master schedule. Um, a lot of that comes from an understanding as how to do it. A lot of it comes from resources that are available to you. How many ... How many exceptional student education, um, teachers do you have on staff? Um, what kind of professional development have you given to your staff, whether it's general education and special education? Um, understanding whether or not MTSS is a special education initiative, or if it's a general education initiative. All of those types of things, um, can affect MTSS and its implementation, so I think my understanding of MTSS comes from my experiences with MTSS where on paper it looks one way, but in practice it can often look, and it translates to something different.

Um, one thing, just from speaking with other people in the field, and from research, it seems as though MTSS varies from school to school, and district to district, even same schools within the same district might be implementing it differently. So I think that's why it's important to understand how is it implemented? What kind of things we've seen across the board to further, and deepen our understanding about MTSS. Um, but I think on paper it looks ... It looks pretty amazing. Um, in practice not so much.

Alex: All right ...

Dana: Does that answer your question?

Alex: Yes.

Dana: Okay.

Alex: Um, what do you think the roles and responsibilities of a special education teacher are?

Dana: So, I think my view of the responsibilities and the roles, um, of the special education teacher are more from what I've seen, again, of our special education teachers, what I've heard about from our different special education teachers, just from experiences, um, collaborating with them in a school setting, or with our students that are, um, studying intervention now at UCF. Um, I'm a general education teacher, so my understanding, or my approach is from looking at it from the general education side, or providing supports to students with disabilities within the general education classroom. So, I think, um, often times their role turns into support .. What we refer to in Florida as support facilitation, where they're providing supports to students with disabilities, who have an identified IEP within their core content classes.

Um, the way that I've seen it work at my school was, they would spend 15, 20 minutes going from class to class providing the supports, but they might not have the content area knowledge that they need to have. Um, and again, my experiences are at the secondary, and not at the elementary. Um, my dissertation is focused on the elementary, so it will be interesting to see if those roles and responsibilities may differ at the elementary level, than they do at the secondary level.

Um, I'm familiar with what teachers in the self-contained classroom do, um, which seems to be more like a general education teacher. They're responsible for the students that are on their rosters, and they provide, you know, an education STEM every day, same students, same everything, but teachers who work in, er, ESE teachers tend to have more caseloads. I think they need to have that caseload knowledge. They need to have an understanding of, um, different strategies. How do I help students, regardless of what the content is, how do I help them understand, and how do I help them chunk the information into manageable pieces. Um, I think they need to have knowledge of different evidence based practices, and I think that they need to have experience implementing those practices, and knowing how to select the appropriate practice for the appropriate, um, intervention that they need to do.

So, if I'm helping students with, for example, spelling, then I need to know evidence based practices in spelling. Um, perhaps even in fluency, um, even in vocabulary, and in comprehension to really help students across the board. I don't think we can just have a narrowed focus. Um, I don't think that there's one or two strategies that work. Often times it's a conjunction of those. And I think a special education teacher needs to have the ability to draw on each one of those different experiences, or knowledge base.

Um, I think that the roles and responsibilities include collaboration. Um, I think that they need to not just collaborate with the, you know, other teachers, or other professionals, I think they need to kind of know how to work with paraprofessionals. I would assume that they're doing a lot of works with paras. I would assume that they do a lot with our school psychologists and guidance counselors, um, but also parents. I think that they need to have that knowledge base of, how do I work with parents, how do I work with, um, my students. I think that they need to have an understanding of how to collaborate with students.

And I know that sounds really odd, but I think that that's part of our collaboration piece, is that we're not just speaking for the students, but understanding how to have the student's voice heard. I think, um, they're responsible for creating IEPs, knowing the laws of special education, knowing how those laws apply to the general education classroom, how those laws apply to the least restrictive environment. I think that they know ... I think they need to know how to advocate. Um, I would say that one of the roles and responsibilities is advocating for their student, advocating for their parents, um, and looking at the best, um, what ... What's best for the

student, so really making their decisions, um, be student based. So I would just say ... I would say all of those things fall within their roles and responsibilities.

Um, maybe grading, um, maybe test prep, maybe helping with studying, maybe providing supports, um, doing one on one interventions, um, working with speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and different people from that realm, I think is also really important, and part of their roles and responsibilities. Um, but just even knowing how to put your schedule together.

Alex: Yeah.

Dana: You get out there and get from, you know, 10 different classrooms in any given day, um, I don't know what their knowledge would need to be for, uh, content, but I do know what No Child Left Behind said that they needed to know, and that I know that schools are currently still operating on No Child Left Behind. Um, so even though every student succeeds at ESSA, was passed in 2015, um, and that does change the highly qualified requirement. I don't think that we've seen that shift in our actual schools. So if I were to look at roles and responsibilities as they currently exist, um, right now in the 2016-2017 school year, that's what I would assume that I may see.

Um, I think teachers, part of their roles and responsibilities is understanding MTSS and how special education, and students with disabilities fall within the MTSS structure. I don't think they can ... I don't think that special education operates independent of MTSS, if that makes sense. So that's what I think their roles ... Roles and responsibilities would be.

Alex: Okay. Um, how do you ... I have an additional question then, to what you were just saying. How do you think ... You mentioned that you're not ... That you're not exactly sure what an elementary, um, would ... Would be like, versus for the secondary realm from where you come from. What would your assumptions be? Um, what would be the differences, or what would you think that the elementary would be? Um ...

Dana: So, I would assume that at the secondary level, um, and I don't know if this happens exactly like this, but my experience at the school that I was at, um, we had multiple special education teachers, but we also have two, three, four times the population of some elementary schools. So I think that they divided it up based on content area.

Alex: Okay.

Dana: So there might be an ESE teacher who specializes in one content area, and then provides supports in those content areas. But I know at the elementary I don't know, but I'm assuming at the elementary level, because their population is smaller, that they may have only one or two teachers, and they might not split it up by

content, but split it up by grade level. They might split it up by, um, you know, where can I fit. Here's the schedule, here's my times available, here's where I can go, here's where I can't go, here's what I can do. So I don't know if it would be content area based, um, versus more grade level based. Because in the secondary, only looking at middle school, you're looking at sixth through eighth grade, versus elementary school you're looking at K through five.

Um, the other thing that I would consider at the elementary level, and again I don't know if this is accurate or not, but the other thing I would assume at an ... At an elementary level is that this is when students begin, especially in K, one, two and three, being identified as students with disabilities. It's when, um, you know, it, it they're considered at risk. Students at third grade are often held back, um, if they don't show mastery of grade level standards, and they aren't proficient on state exams. So I think that MTSS probably translates differently at that level because third grade is a mandatory retention in the state of Florida. Um, so I think that makes a difference in where do I ... Where do teachers, special education teachers fall within that.

And then, um, making sure again that we're following the IEP. So, you know, when it comes turn to visualize education plans, the general education teacher need to have knowledge of that, but I think that the special education teacher needs to have a deeper knowledge, and needs to be making sure that those things that are on their IEP ... Um, the responsibility is there for the general education teacher, I'm not absolving them of that responsibility at all.

Um, but I think that the special education teacher, because of their training, may have more, or a greater understanding of what it needs to be. So, um, and they're the ones that are writing these IEPs, so they're identifying goals, identifying student's current level of performance, and then where do they need to be, and then being able to say, well here's a reasonable goal. Here's how we're going to get to this. Here's how we're going to achieve, and make sure that this student remains on grade level, or gets back onto grade level, or, um, performs the same as their able bodied peers.

Alex: Okay. Very good. Um, okay now finally, what do you expect to find in this study, and why do you expect?

Dana: Ooo, what do I expect to find? Um, I'd like to think that I don't have any expectations, because again, my knowledge of elementary school is limited. And I think that that's a benefit for this study, because a lot of my experiences are at the secondary level. So I think I'm going to be very open to seeing how things operate. Um, I think that the MTSS structure, again, not just ... Um, is going to be different. So the rules and responsibilities of the ESE teacher are going to be different, but MTSS is also going to be implemented very differently than what I'm used to seeing. So I'm excited to see how it's done, um, to inform the field as to what it ... So here's

what a teacher does all day, and then here's how we can provide them with supports.

I'm assuming that I'm going to see teachers wearing different hats. I'm going to assume that their roles and responsibilities have increased over time. I'm going to assume that, um, they have many roles, and many responsibilities, and that those roles and responsibilities exceed that of the general education teacher, um, and differ from the general education teacher. But I can't pinpoint how they differ, and I can't pinpoint, um, you know, the ... The extent to which they differ. Um, I think that that's going to be dependent on... On what emerges from ... From the data, and from the people that I ... That I interview. Because I ... I don't have those experiences. I don't have that knowledge, because that's not where I worked. I didn't work elementary.

Alex: Okay. All righty. So that is all the questions that I have for you. [inaudible 15:51] have any other comments that you want to make, or you would like to.

Dana: No, no, I think, um, I think I have an understanding as to what MTSS should look like, as far as the tiers, the structures, providing the supports, so now it's just a matter of what do those supports look like? Do we have the time to implement those supports? Um, does what we know in the research, and in the literature, is that reflected in the classroom? Um, so I think that when I [inaudible 16:25] that's what I am assuming it is, so ... All right, thank you so much for your time tonight Alex.

Alex: Oh yeah, no worries, no worries. Thank you.

Dana: All right. Thanks.

Alex: Okay, All righty, thank you Dena.

Dana: Good night.

Alex: You too.

APPENDIX D: PEER-DEBRIEFER INSTRUCTIONS

Dear Peer-Debriefer,

Thank you for agreeing to assist me with my dissertation study.

To ensure reliability and validity of the data collected, I am using several qualitative methods. One of those methods is using a peer de-briefer. I have 7 total participant interviews. I have completed analysis of the first and attached it here. I have purposefully left off my dissertation overview as I do not want to influence your interpretation of the data.

I've attached a file that includes the following:

1. Original transcript
2. **Excel file of my analysis of the original transcript:**
Column A – exactly what they said from the transcript (Significant Statements)
Column B – My inference based on their words/mannerisms (Components of Meaning)
Column C – Organizing Components of Meaning
Column D – Describing the Phenomenon (Theme)
3. Data analysis procedures from my dissertation [Colazzi (1978) method]
4. Dissertation Interview Questions

MY steps:

1. I highlighted important phrases from the data transcript
2. I put those phrases into a spreadsheet (Column A) exactly as they appeared in the transcript
3. I then assigned meaning to them (Column B)
4. I then coded each of the components and organized them into relevant meanings (Column C)
5. I assigned overarching themes to each of the components (Column D)

What I need YOU to do:

1. Read the Excel spreadsheet and provide feedback by doing the following for EACH line:
 - a. Read Column A and Column B.
 - b. Based on what you see in Column A, do you agree with the meaning assigned in Column B?
 - c. Now look at Column C.
 - d. Do you agree with the component of meaning in Column C?
 - e. Do you agree with the theme in Column D?
2. Provide comment/feedback in Column E. If you do/don't agree. If you don't agree, WHY, and what do you think is a better match?
3. Use the original transcript if you need context or more information.

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, please let me know.

APPENDIX E: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Special Education Teacher Demographic Survey

Instructions: Please answer the following questions.

START HERE

1. What is your current position title? _____
2. How do you classify your position at your current school of employment?
 - ☐ Full-time teacher
 - ☐ Part-time teacher
 - ☐ Itinerant teacher (your school requires you to provide instruction at more than one school)
3. How many years have you taught? _____
4. How many of those years were in special education? _____
5. Identify ALL grade levels taught.

6. Identify ALL subject areas taught.

7. In what areas are you certified?

8. Where did you receive your teaching degree? _____
9. What is your highest level of education? _____
10. How many students are on your caseload? _____
11. How many students do you work with that are at-risk but not yet identified for special education? _____
12. What is your Age in years? _____
13. What is your race? _____
14. What is your Gender?
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

THANK YOU!!

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your response is very important to us

APPENDIX F: CODING

Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning (Colaizzi Step 4)

Access to GE curriculum	Didn't have the certification for K-5
Accessing resources	Differentiation
Accommodations	Disservice to the Self-contained students
Accommodations vs. Interventions	District approved programs
Accommodations vs. Modifications	district approved resources only
Admin	Document for Compliance
Admin - removed value, lessened resources	Educating the GE teacher
admin value on ESE by providing supports	ESE in MTSS
Assessment	ESE teacher value
Assigned non-ESE teacher duties	Ethical Tension
Autonomy - had own classroom	Ethical Tension due to placement
Autonomy - moved to self-contained	Extra time to improve school performance
Autonomy - started in inclusive setting	Flexibility
Behavior	Focus on Placement - not Service
behavior - social skills	Focus on Placement not Service - Minutes
Behavior independent Functioning	Focus on placement/time not intervention and time was limited
Behavior is an Issue	Focus on time - not service
Caseload	Full inclusion
Caseload size changed	Funding affecting placement
Change	GE Teacher Expectations of SWDs
Change in Admin - led to better school culture	Grade Level Standards
Change in placement/services	Had evaluation responsibilities – now the school psychologist role
Change in role/responsibilities with inclusion, increased accountability	Had more teacher time to plan
Change in Role/Responsibility - not part of the decision-making process	Had more teacher time to plan
Collaboration	Had own classroom - now just an assistant
Compassion	Had teaching responsibilities – now just an assistant
Compliance	Had to have more content area knowledge
Computer Based Program to improve Student outcomes	High expectations of SWDs
Constantly changing	I am a visitor in the GE classroom
Consultation	IEP
Data	IEP - paperwork
Data/Lower Expectations of Students with Disabilities	IEP based decisions
Deficiency	Increase Knowledge/Skills - had to learn how to meet needs
	Increasing Knowledge
	Intervention

Intervention in MTSS
 Job Expectations
 Knowledge of disability categories
 Learning Gains
 Legal Consideration of changing IEPs
 Less students qualify
 Lesson planning
 Lesson Planning for Small Group
 Intervention
 Lesson plans
 Low Expectations
 Lower Expectations of Students with Disabilities
 Master schedule
 Math/Reading Improvement
 Math/Reading were pull out
 Meetings
 Mentors
 Motivation
 Motivation/Mindset
 MTSS
 MTSS fast-track to ESE
 MTSS varies school wide
 Multiple roles as an ESE teacher
 Need more ESE teachers to meet student needs
 No access to GE curriculum, lower expectations of student ability
 No autonomy, feel like assistant, no classroom
 No classroom - office
 No collaboration in Pullout
 No involvement prior to ESE referral
 No time to plan
 Not extra time for intervention
 Not included in PLC
 Not meeting student needs/ not individualized/not enough supports
 Not Urban - more like her
 Paperwork
 Paperwork - responsibilities outside of

support
 Parent Education
 Parent Input
 Passion
 PD not relevant
 Placement
 Placement Change - Full inclusion
 Placement change - resource room
 Placement change - support facilitation
 Placement changed - not supports/IEPs
 Placement was self-contained/resource room
 Placement/services – students were pulled out
 Placement/services – students were pulled out, more individualized, better way to meet needs
 Planning
 previous way of providing services is better/ less students qualify for ESE
 Previously enjoyed job/Job Satisfaction
 Previously had autonomy in own classroom
 Problem Solving
 Professional Development
 Provide Accommodations
 Providing services is primary role
 Providing supports for students with ASD
 Reading Focus
 Reading/Math focus
 Resources
 Same disability category serviced
 Schedule
 Self-Contained was a catch all for all disabilities regardless of category
 Separate roles/responsibilities
 Shared responsibility
 Small group
 Social Skills Instruction - Pulled from Classroom
 Specialist in my area (SPED)
 Student input

Student Mindset
Student perception of ESE
Students missing foundational skills
Students pulled from services for other things
Support Facilitation
Support multiple areas
Support multiple areas/grade level
Teacher Support - I could go to others for help
Tested into ESE - no education background

Testing/Assessment Accommodations
Time Management
Time not allocated for planning
Tries to go back to pull out, even though it's not allowed
Trust
Trying anything
Urban/High-Need
Various needs of students
Various Teaching Strategies

Describing the Phenomenon - Themes (Colaizzi Step 5)	
Phenomenon	Corresponding Overarching Theme
Accommodations	Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs
Accommodations not Intervention	Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs
Accommodations vs. Modifications	Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs
Alternative Curriculum	Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs
Assessment	Data
Autonomy	Autonomy
Behavior	Behavior
Caseload	Caseload
Change in Role/Responsibility	Change in Role/Responsibility
Change in Role/Responsibility - No longer teaching/evaluating	Change in Role/Responsibility
Change in Role/Responsibility to Assistant	Change in Role/Responsibility
Change in Role/Responsibility - not part of the decision making process	Change in Role/Responsibility
Collaboration	Collaboration
Collaboration - Positive	Collaboration
Compassion	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Compliance	Compliance
Computer Program	District Driven Decisions
Consultation	Collaboration
Content Knowledge no longer required	Change in Role/Responsibility
Data	Data
Deficiency	Deficiency
Deficiency Focus - Not Ability	Deficiency
Demographics	N/A
Difficulty adjusting to Inclusion	Full Inclusion
District Approved Programs	District Driven Decisions
Educating the GE Teacher	Professional Development
ESE in MTSS	MTSS
ESE Teacher Value	ESE Teacher Value

<p> Ethics Expectations Expectations of SWD Flexibility Focus on Time - not Support Full Inclusion IEP Based Decisions Improving School/Student Performance Job Satisfaction Knowledge of disability categories Master Schedule Mentors Modification vs. Accommodation MTSS MTSS fast-track to ESE MTSS varies across school Multiple roles as the ESE teacher Paperwork Parent Education Parent Involvement Passion Placement Change Placement not Service Planning Pre-ESE Previously a disservice Previously More Individualized Priority is ESE student Professional Development Resources Schedule Shared Responsibilities Small group Strategies knowledge to improve student learning </p>	<p> Ethics Expectations Expectations ESE Teacher Characteristic Placement Change Full Inclusion Data Data ESE Teacher Value ESE Teacher Knowledge Base Schedule Collaboration Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs MTSS MTSS MTSS ESE Teacher Knowledge Base Paperwork Collaboration Collaboration ESE Teacher Characteristic Placement Change Placement Change Planning Pre-ESE Full Inclusion Full Inclusion Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs Professional Development Resources Schedule Full Inclusion Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs Accommodations and Supporting Student Needs </p>
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Student Mindset Student perception of ESE Student Skillset Support Facilitation Tested into ESE - no education background Time Management Trust	Student Mindset Student Mindset Student Skillset Full Inclusion ESE Teacher Knowledge Base Schedule ESE Teacher Characteristic
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Theme	Sub-Theme
Support Facilitation	Change in Placement
	Managing Caseloads
	Time for Supporting Students (Resources/Time)
	Providing Accommodations
	Supporting Academic Needs
	Supporting Behavior Needs
	Supporting the GE Teacher (Educating the GE Teacher/Professional Development)
Change in Role/Responsibility	Loss of Autonomy
	No Evaluation Responsibilities
	Increased Paperwork
	Legal Compliance
	Data Collection and Decision-Making
Collaboration	Communication
	Building Relationships
	Time for Common Planning
	ESE Teacher Value
MTSS	Pre-ESE
	School-Wide Intervention time
	Computer Based Intervention/Technology
	District Driven Decisions
Inclusion	Deficiency/Student Skillset
	Ethics
	Expectations
	Schedule
	Student Mindset

APPENDIX G: VALIDITY CHECKING EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Good morning <Participant Name>!

I hope that all is well. It has been a while since we met for the interview for my dissertation, but I have been working on various aspects of it in preparation for the next steps.

A critical part of the study is ensuring that you have the opportunity to review the transcripts from the interview and comment on them for their accuracy and completeness. To facilitate this process, I have attached the transcript here for your review. **I ask that you please review. If you wish, please feel free to make comments or additions using track changes.** Track changes will allow me to quickly identify areas where you have made suggestions/edits/comments/additions etc. **If you do not have any changes, please respond to this email indicating such.**

Again, your insight is valuable and I so appreciate your time!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email, or my phone number is listed below. Have a great rest of your week.

Dena Dillenseger Slanda
Doctoral Candidate
Project LEAD Scholar
University of Central Florida
College of Education and Human Performance
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407-227-6663

Follow-Up Email

Hello <Participant Name>,

I hope you are enjoying spring break! I wanted to follow up on an email I sent to you back on March 9 re: dissertation interview.

If you could please read the transcript (attached) and respond to this email (see directions below), I would greatly appreciate it.

Also – I have one additional question: How many general education teachers do you support and how many general education classrooms do you provide support in?

Thank you so much, I really appreciate it!!

Dena Dillenseger Slanda
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