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Principals must be instructional leaders in their schools in order to adhere
to federal, state, and local mandates as well as being able to discern that the
programs for students with disabilities are being developed and implemented
with fidelity to meet the needs of those students.  The transition a school goes
through to include students with disabilities in the regular classroom is a change
that affects everyone: faculty, staff, students, and parents.  Best practice should
emerge from what is currently known about implementing special education
programs.  This research study will focus on ways principals and support
personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) work together or collaborate in
developing and implementing an inclusion program;  factors in principal
preparation and professional development programs that influence principals'
perspectives and perceptions of special education; and  how principals establish
a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are
implementing inclusion programs.  Collaboration should be a crucial element to
creating and maintaining successful inclusive schools.

Using the three research questions as a foundation, this study used a
qualitative, case study research approach to investigate the perceptions that
principals, teachers (both regular education and special education), and central
office support staff have on developing and implementing special education
inclusion programs in their schools.

Semi-structured interviews, observations and field-notes from classroom observations were utilized as data collection tools to assure that a reliable qualitative study was accomplished.  Through these methods I was able to observe, examine and analyze the specific situations and experiences of the teachers and students in the school settings.

The principal's responsibilities with regards to special education are:  to develop/continue programs that adhere to the law/policy; encourage communication and collaboration with special education staff; attend IEP meetings; keep current on what works; monitor/evaluate their school's current practices for process improvement.  More importantly, giving teachers opportunities for good quality professional development on how to be an effective inclusion co-teacher and what that looks like in the classroom is crucial to effective implementation of an inclusion program.  The principalship should include visionary leadership qualities, efficient operations management, high quality instructional leadership, and advocacy practices that address the specific needs of students. These elements should be evident in services for students with disabilities, or more specifically, the inclusionary or co-teaching practices at the school.  Principals should be knowledgeable of special education law and policy as well as developing an environment that encourages and supports collegiality among staff members.

This change in philosophy to educating exceptional children in the regular classroom has resulted in a cultural change in many schools.  The principal is at

the center of this cultural change and is the central agent responsible for transitioning schools to inclusion in the regular education classroom where special education students are provided the necessary supports in order to learn alongside their non-disabled peers.

There are two general principles as to why schools should implement inclusion programs for their special education students.  First, services in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities are required by law-IDEA.  Second, inclusive practices give students with disabilities access to the general curriculum.

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A

MIDDLE SCHOOL INCLUSION PROGRAM



by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

**The Principal and Special Education**

Principals in the public school system have had the responsibility of

serving students with disabilities in the regular school setting for many years.

Federal laws that will be discussed later in this study mandate that students

receiving special education services be given access to the general curriculum.

In the past, the most likely consequence for principals not providing appropriate

education for students with disabilities was a legal battle for the school district

(Huefner, 1994).

Stronger consequences have been established for principals in their

leadership role for special education with the implementation of No Child Left

Behind (2001) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).  NCLB and AYP will be

discussed later in this study.  Following the fourth year of their school not making

AYP, it is possible that the principal may be removed from their position.  It is my

observation that meeting the needs of students with disabilities is a major

challenge for principals especially since Students with Disabilities is a subgroup

in meeting AYP proficiency.

Faced with such a harsh reality, the knowledge principals hold of meeting

the needs of special education students is of critical importance.  As the

instructional leader of the school, the principal must ensure that every student is performing and achieving on grade level.  Students with disabilities do not learn as the typical, average student does, therefore that is why they receive special education services.  Whether or not principals have been prepared for special education in university and principal training programs, they will still be expected to have every child on grade level by the school year 2013-2014.

The Obama administration has offered states the chance to waive some requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act in recognition that parts of the law are dated. States are required, however, to make specific reforms in exchange for increased flexibility.  NCLB lacks focus on college and career readiness. States can request flexibility from specific NCLB mandates that are stifling reform, but only if they are transitioning students, teachers, and schools to a system aligned with college and career ready standards for all students, developing differentiated accountability systems, and undertaking reforms to support effective classroom instruction and school leadership (Ayers & Owen, 2012).

The law identifies schools as "in need of improvement" whether they missed achievement targets by a little or a lot. It also prescribes lockstep interventions for those schools, which are not working as well as they could and are not always tailored to the context of the school.  Further, the law ensures teachers have credentials to enter the profession but does not ensure they are effective instructors (Center for American Progress, 2012).

In order to address the deficiencies in No Child Left Behind, the Department of Education is granting waivers for two years, after which states may reapply for an additional two-year waiver. States that secure waivers are no longer required to ensure universal student proficiency in math and reading under NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress provision. NCLB requires that, over time, states raise the bar to achieve 100 percent student proficiency in reading and math. Thirty three states plus the District of Columbia have been granted waivers. North Carolina is one of those states that has been granted a waiver.

Principals do not work with students directly, so effective leadership of teachers is essential. Just like the students, teachers of special education have different needs than those of general education teachers. Therefore, support needed for special education teachers require greater principal knowledge and preparation in special education. Principal administrative support is crucial, as it affects special education teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, and decision to stay in their current position.

Principals must trust that their special education teachers are able to develop and implement special education programs that will meet the needs of all their students. Principals must move from micromanaging programs to developing and supporting leadership potential and practice in their special education teachers (Martinez & Humphries, 2006).

**Statement of the Problem**

Principals must be instructional leaders in their schools in order to adhere to federal, state, and local mandates as well as being able to discern that the programs for students with disabilities are being developed and implemented with fidelity to meet the needs of those students.  The transition a school goes through to include students with disabilities in the regular classroom is a change that affects everyone: faculty, staff, students, and parents.  Best practice should emerge from what is currently known about implementing special education programs.  This research study will focus on ways principals and support personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) work together or collaborate in developing and implementing an inclusion program;  factors in principal preparation and professional development programs that influence principals' perspectives and perceptions of special education; and  how principals establish a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are implementing inclusion programs.  Collaboration should be a crucial element to creating and maintaining successful inclusive schools.  However, in schools today, the term *collaboration* is used in many ways, often contributing to confusion, rather than clarity, about ideas, programs, and services (Cook & Friend, 2010).  Among educators, collaboration is a style professionals select to share work based on voluntary participation, parity, mutual goals, shared responsibility for key decisions, shared resources, cooperative values, shared expertise, and shared accountability for outcomes (Block, 1981; Brown, Wyne,

Blackburn, & Powell, 1979; Friend & Cook, 1992; Morsink, Thomas, & Correa, 1991). It is grounded in the conscious development of trust, respect, and a sense of community (Cook & Friend, 2010). Inclusion is a philosophy and collaboration is a style; one that, according to Cook & Friend (2010), only exists when applied to a particular endeavor.  While it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that compliance with state and federal law for students with disabilities are followed, principals still have to rely on and delegate elements of their programs to their special education and regular education staff.  Principals are accountable for the performance of students with disabilities using the general education curriculum. What this means is that for principals to meet these responsibilities, they have to have an understanding of special education law and policy, ethics of special education practice, and how this all requires they be instructional leaders for the education of all students.

Programs for students with disabilities have been going through various stages of change and/or improvement since the 1970's. In 1975, Congress passed legislation that mandated that eligible students with disabilities be provided with appropriate special education services that meet their individual needs.  This law is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).  The following six main principles of IDEA embody the underlying spirit and intent of IDEA and provide the framework around which special education services are designed and provided to students with disabilities:

1. **Free Appropriate Public Education** — IDEA guarantees that each child with a disability, eligible for special education, will be entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

   **Free** requires that the education of each child with a disability must be provided at public expense and at no cost to the child's parents. The only exception is that incidental fees normally charged to non-disabled students or their parents as part of the regular education program may also be charged to students with disabilities and their parents.

   **Appropriate** means that each child with a disability is entitled to an education that is "appropriate" for his or her needs. "Appropriate education" is determined on an individual basis and may not be the same for each child with a disability.

   **Public** refers to the public school system. Children with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities, have the same right to attend the public schools as their non-disabled peers. The public school system must educate students with disabilities, respond to their individual needs, and help them plan for their future.

   **Education** - IDEA is an education act that guarantees that eligible children with disabilities will receive a public education that includes special education and related services as directed by the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), based on the child's individual needs.

2. **Appropriate Evaluation** — IDEA requires that each child suspected of having a disability receive an appropriate evaluation:

- In all areas of suspected disability.

- By a team of evaluators knowledgeable and trained in the use of the tests and other evaluation materials they use.

- Employing a variety of sound evaluation materials and procedures selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory.

- Without subjecting a child to unnecessary tests and assessments.

- Including the gathering of relevant information from a variety of sources.

- Based on information that is useful instructionally in planning for the child's education.

- An appropriate evaluation provides information to be used to determine the child's eligibility for special education and related services and the educational needs of the child.

3. **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** — In order to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate and individualized education, IDEA requires that, after drawing upon current evaluation information, the IEP team develop a written document, the IEP, designed to meet the unique educational needs of each student with disabilities. IDEA contains clear language about:

- The information which the IEP must contain.

- Who develops the IEP.

- The public agency's obligation to provide the special education and related services identified in the IEP.

4. **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** — IDEA guarantees that a child with a disability will receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate. This principle reflects IDEA's strong preference for educating students with disabilities in general education classes with the access to general education curriculum. Placement in the general education classroom is the first placement option the IEP team must consider.  When considering placement in the general education classroom, the team is required to explore the range of modifications and supplementary aids and services that are needed to ensure that the student can receive a satisfactory education in the general education classroom. If the IEP team determines that the student can be appropriately educated in the general education classroom using modifications/supplementary aids and services, this is the LRE for that particular student.  However, the IEP team may determine that the student cannot be educated satisfactorily in the general classroom, even with the provision of modifications and supplementary aids and services. The team must then consider other placements outside of the general classroom in order to provide FAPE for the child. The range of such placements that

each school system is required to have available is commonly referred to as the "continuum of alternative placements." Thus, like all other components of a student's special education, the LRE must be determined for each student based upon **that child's individual needs**.

5. **Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making** —This principle reinforces the belief that the education of children with disabilities is made more effective by strengthening the role of parents in the special education process. IDEA requires that parents (and students, as appropriate) participate in each step of the special education process. Students must be invited to participate in IEP meetings where transition services are to be discussed. Parent involvement includes:

   - Equal partnership in the decision-making process.

   - The right to receive notice.

   - The right to give consent for certain activities such as evaluations, changes in placement; and release of information to others.

   - The right to participate in all meetings concerning their child's special education.

6. **Procedural Safeguards** — Procedural safeguards are a set of activities whose purpose is to ensure that:

   - The rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected.

- All information needed to make decisions about the provision of a free appropriate public education to the student is provided to parents of children with disabilities and to the student when appropriate.

- Procedures (mediation and due process) are in place to resolve disagreements between parties.

Some procedural safeguards under IDEA include the right of parents to:

- Inspect and review their child's educational records.

- Obtain an independent educational evaluation (IEE).

- Be given written prior notice on matters regarding the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of their child.

- Request mediation and an impartial due process hearing.

- Be given a full explanation of all of the procedural safeguards under IDEA and State complaint procedures.

- Appeal the initial hearing decision to the State Education Agency (SEA) if the SEA did not conduct the hearing; (also the right of the public agency).

- Have child remain in his/her present educational placement, unless the parent and the public agency agree otherwise, while administrative or judicial proceedings are pending.

- Bring a civil action in an appropriate State or Federal court to appeal a final hearing decision; (also the right of the public agency).

- Request reasonable attorney's fees from a court for actions or proceedings brought under the IDEA under certain circumstances.

- Give or refuse consent before their child is evaluated or reevaluated.

- Participate in (and in some cases to appeal) discipline decisions regarding students with disabilities.

IDEA has forever changed the way America deals with children with disabilities. It has given teachers, as well as parents, a great responsibility to educate disabled children just as their non-disabled peers. It has put in place safeguards to ensure that every child gets the best education possible and a chance to succeed not only in the educational setting but also in life.

School leaders have difficulty when it comes to implementing programs for special needs students. Their understanding of best practices, adherence to the letter of the law, and their view of leadership directly impacts the success of public school programs for special needs students. Administrators are not always prepared or knowledgeable about special education law and policy. Principals do not necessarily know or have experience with what quality special education programs should include or how they should be implemented.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The terms used in this case study have been given various definitions in the related literature. However, for the purpose of this case study it is important to clarify these key terms for the reader.

**Administrators/School Administration:** Central office administrators or the principal of the school.

**AYP:** Adequate Yearly Progress is the measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable for student performance under Title I of the [No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)](), the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 6311)

**Continuum of Services:** The continuum of services is a range of placement and service options to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities.

**Co-teaching/Cooperative Teaching:** Two or more teachers plan and deliver instruction together, usually in an inclusive classroom.

**EC Case Manager:** An exceptional children lead teacher position. The EC Case manager serves as the leader in the IEP and organizational process.

**IDEA:** Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) §H.R. 1350 (Nov. 19, 2004).

**IEP:** An Individualized Education Program (IEP) describes the educational program that has been designed to meet that child's unique needs. Each child who receives special education and related services must have an IEP 20 U.S.C. § 1414 (1(A)).

**Inclusion:** Students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, are served in age-appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplemental aids-for both children and teachers.

**Mainstreaming:** Mainstreaming is IDEA's preference for the placement of exceptional students. Placement of exceptional students is to be in the least restrictive environment as possible, which means, regular classroom setting.

**NCLB:** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law by President Bush on Jan. 8, 2002, was a reauthorization of the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](), the central federal law in pre-collegiate education.

**Regular Education Teacher:** The regular education teacher who works together or "co-teaches" with the special education teacher.

**Section 504:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973  Rehabilitation Act of 1973 § 104, 29 U.S.C. § 794 requires public school districts that receive federal funds to place students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers in the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible so as to meet the needs of the student with a handicapping condition.  This law requires public school districts to supply the necessary supports and supplementary aids so as to support the success of the student with a handicapping condition (Rehabilitation Act of 1973 § 104, 34).

**Service Delivery:** The method by which special education services are provided to students.  Methods for this study are:  consultation, inclusion, resource, and self-contained.

**Special Education:** A federally funded program designed to provide access to a free and appropriate education to children with disabilities up to age 21 in public school systems. Schools must provide services according to the regulations set

forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Act, known as IDEA. All public schools in the U.S. are required by law to adhere to these regulations and provide direct and supportive services to assist children with disabilities.

**Special Education Teacher:**  The special education teacher who works together or "co-teaches" with the regular education teacher.

**Student with a Disability:**  Any person attending a public or charter school who (1) has physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or (2) has record of such impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such impairment  (20 U.S.C. § 1401 (3(A)).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide principals' and others' perspectives on developing and implementing inclusion programs in schools and to examine how principals' knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice affects how they implement special education programs.

Special education programs, especially regular education inclusion programs have been in existence for over twenty years.  The literature and studies are not that prevalent as of yet.  In the course of this study, my perception is that this type of study of inclusion programs is still in it's infancy since there is not much supporting literature to be utilized.  I have found that much of the research is cyclical in that researchers are quoting and utilizing the same research foundations.

There is research that discusses principals' roles in inclusion and leading special education programs. There are many ways that principals can facilitate inclusion as well as support teachers' implementation of academic accommodations.

> The principal determines the climate and degree to which this process is successful. Principals must provide staff with adequate training, access to support personnel, and opportunities for professional development regarding best practices in teaching students with disabilities. It is also important that principals know the relevant provisions of IDEA and NCLB so they can help staff members establish proper systems for assessing needs and making decisions on an ongoing basis. Further, principals should consider three key factors in the provision of reasonable academic accommodations: selecting appropriate accommodations and including them in the IEP, effectively implementing the IEP accommodations, and evaluating the effectiveness of the academic accommodations in meeting the student's academic goals as determined by the IEP (Martinez & Humphreys, 2006).

Boscardin (2005) states that "secondary school administrators will need to redefine their leadership, transforming the dual system of general and special education administration to a distributed system of leadership that collaboratively supports the use of proven practices to achieve school-wide improvement for students with disabilities" (p. 31). Boscardin also states that: "two ways of creating supportive administrative roles are to shift the role of the administrator from one of manager to one of instructional leader, and to use leadership strategies to establish effective evidence-based instructional practices that improve the educational outcomes for all students" (p. 31).

The purpose of this study is to provide principals' and others' perspectives on developing and implementing inclusion programs in schools and to examine how principals' knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice affects how they implement special education programs.

This research is not an attempt to reveal the truth based on empirical evidence but rather to present the perceptions of school personnel based on their specific experiences. Past perceptions have seen principals as more of a manager and less of an instructional leader. Principals need to be able to make a shift to becoming an instructional leader in order to be able to support implementing inclusion programs. Principals no longer have the option of saying to someone in their school, "go do this". A principal's special education knowledge has to be evident and principals must be willing to be continuously learning when it comes to special programming. This researcher wants to find out just what principals really do know about special education law, policy, and practice; how principals implement inclusion programs, who do principals involve in the implementation process; how do they all collaborate about the process; and what the teachers' (special education and regular education) perceptions of their principal and their implementation of inclusion programs are.

## Rationale for the Study

Special education program implementation is typically the most challenging for principals and school support personnel based on what this researcher observed, also that in some cases special education teachers do not

feel they have the support of their principal in regards to what they (the principal) feel are best practices to meet the specific needs of special education students' individualized education plans in their schools.  Also it was observed that principals often feel they do not have the support they require to develop and implement special education programs in their buildings; whether from central office support, or the support of the special education teachers in their building.

The perception is that there is a disconnect often times between whose responsibility it is to develop and implement special education programs in the school.  The principals in this study had felt that way in the past.   In this study, the review of the literature offers a basis in identifying the areas in which principals and teachers need support as well as what methods of special education teaching are the most sound to meet the needs of special education students.  Methodologically, open-ended questions were created that focused on aspects that principals, teachers, and special education support staff may consider when assessing what support they need to develop and monitor special education programs in their schools.

Students with disabilities are generally identified based on physical, emotional, or learning difficulties.  (Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act, §H.R. 1350 (Nov. 19, 2004).  There are procedures in place to determine what the specific needs of these students are.  These procedures are governed by due process of law.  A student's specific needs should be addressed through the development of an appropriate Individualized Education

Plan (IEP) that allows the student to function in the least restrictive environment while not giving this student an advantage over their non-disabled peers (Wrightslaw, 1999-2005).

## Personal Motivation for the Study

As a student with a learning disability who was not diagnosed until college, I have always been an advocate for equity in regards to the continuum of services for students with disabilities. My position as a School Guidance Counselor at the time this research was conducted allowed me to be the School Assistance Team Chairperson for the last five years as well as the School Referral Coordinator making me directly involved with special education procedures at my school. I was required to attend IEP meetings when necessary as well as use my knowledge and expertise in conducting student referral meetings. Also, it was my responsibility to build inclusive teaching opportunities into the school's master schedule. My preparation in school counseling as well as in school administration gives me a unique perspective in the student referral process, scheduling, implementation, and how to best meet the needs of students.

In my recently appointed position of Assistant Principal, I have immersed myself in special education procedures and practices. In my new administrative position in a different school system, I am required to be the LEA representative and attend IEP meetings. I work closely with the EC teachers using my expertise

in inclusion and co-teaching to assist them with their service delivery and how they are meeting the needs of our students with disabilities.

In my previous district, the middle school division has implemented a full inclusion program for the students with disabilities at each school. These programs utilize a co-teaching approach. Therefore, I am interested in what sort of leadership roles and functions develop during the implementation of inclusion programs.

## Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide principals' and others' perspectives on developing and implementing inclusion programs in schools and to examine how principals' knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice affects how they implement special education programs.

The following research questions were the primary research questions for the study:

1. From a cultural, policy, and implementation perspective, how do principals support personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) who work together to develop and implement a special education inclusion program?
2.  What are the factors in principal preparation and professional development programs that influence principals' perspectives and perceptions of special education?

3. How do principals establish a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are implementing inclusion programs?

**Research Design**

Using the three research questions as a foundation, this study used a qualitative, case study research approach to reflect the perceptions that principals, teachers (both regular education and special education), and central office support staff have on developing and implementing special education inclusion programs in their schools. Creswell's (1998) definition of a case study is "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). This case is a "bounded system by time (data collection) and places (several campuses)" (p. 37). A single program (special education inclusion) was selected as the phenomenon that was investigated in this study.

Interviewing, observations, and field notes were the principal methods used to collect data in this study and to develop a discussion of the principal's role in the implementation of inclusion programs for special education in four middle schools of one large urban district. Semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes from classroom observations were utilized as data collection tools to assure that a trustworthy qualitative study was accomplished. Through these methods I as the principal researcher was able to observe,

examine and analyze the specific situations and experiences of the principals and teachers in special education programs in the school setting.

A voice recorder was used during the interviews, but the line of questioning had to be flexible as I felt that would be more beneficial when speaking with central office and support staff rather than following rigid questions. I wanted the interviews to develop in participant's own words from their experiences. It became evident during the course of the interviews that if I had used structured and rigid questions, valuable insights and information would have been lost.

Three different data sources were triangulated. Taped interviews, field notes, and observations of regular education classrooms in which a co-teaching method was utilized to implement inclusion services for their special education students.

### Organization of the Case Study

This qualitative case study is organized and presented in six chapters. Chapter I offers an introduction to the study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature as it relates to special education law, policy, best practices, methods of teaching, inclusion practices, and leadership. Chapter III describes the research design of the case study and the school settings. Chapter IV serves as an introduction to the participants. Chapter V presents the findings of this case study as the data relates to principal's role and responsibility, support, and

leadership.  Finally, Chapter VI provides conclusions, recommendations and

suggestions for further research.

**CHAPTER II**

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Chapter I offered an introduction to this qualitative case study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature as it relates to the principal in developing and implementing inclusion programs for special education services. The purpose of this literature review is to describe what is known about special education law and policy, program delivery methods, best practices for implementation, and a re-defining of leadership roles.

Since 1918, compulsory education laws have existed in the United States, but many students with disabilities were excluded from being educated in public schools until the mid-1970s (Yell, 2012). Since then, laws have been established that govern the education of students with disabilities and promote the inclusion of these students in the regular classroom (Wright & Wright, 2004). Three laws have impacted special education services the most: Public Law 91-142 or the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later to be re-named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB). These laws have been crucial to the integration of students with disabilities into the regular classroom.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

By 1975, Congress had determined that millions of students with

disabilities were not receiving an appropriate education.  This finding and several

state and federal court cases caused the enactment of the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142).  This legislation required public

schools to provide students with disabilities with a "free and appropriate public

education" (FAPE).  According to Yell (2012), "the key to providing FAPE is for

school personnel to develop and implement a program based on a full and

individualized assessment of a student that consists of specially designed

instruction tailored to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" (IDEA, 20

U.S.C. § 1401 (a)(16)).  The  mission statement of IDEA is:

> …to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free
> appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and
> related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them
> for further education, employment and independent living…[and] to ensure
> that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are
> protected…(IDEA, Section 1400(d))

Not only did PL 94-142 protect the rights of students with disabilities, it

also required public school districts to provide the students with disabilities to be

educated in the "least restrictive environment," possibly through a process called

"mainstreaming".  The term "mainstreaming" is not in the law but it is a descriptor

of the process that was expected for educating students with disabilities.  This

provision was designed to put students with disabilities along-side their non-

disabled peers in the school and classroom.  PL 94-142 became known as the

"mainstreaming law" even though the word "mainstream" never appears in the legislation. In 1990, PL 94-142 was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and has since been reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004).

IDEA has been amended and reauthorized three times since the legislation was first written. "The primary goal of Congress in passing IDEA 2004 is to align IDEA with NCLB, thereby increasing accountability for improving student performance" (Yell, 2012, p. 106). Although IDEA does not mandate that all students with disabilities be placed in the regular education program, it does require that students with disabilities be educated "to the maximum extend appropriate" in the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment means that a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be education with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate. They should have access to the general education curriculum and any other program that their non-disabled peers would have access to (IDEA, 34 C.F.R. § 300.550(b)(1)).

According to IDEA, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team must first consider the regular classroom as the least restrictive environment. Therefore, the purpose of IDEA is to educate as many students as possible in the regular classroom alongside their non-disabled peers and give access to any supplementary services or equipment necessary to achieve their educational goals when placed alongside their non-disabled peers.

## Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

In 1973, Congress authorized Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112). Section 504 requires public school districts that receive federal funds to place students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers in the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible so as to meet the needs of the student with a handicapping condition. According to the regulations:

> To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to: (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or (2) have a record of such an impairment; or (3) be regarded as having such an impairment. Section 504 requires that school districts provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students in their jurisdictions who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
> The determination of whether a student has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity must be made on the basis of an individual inquiry. The Section 504 regulatory provision at 34 C.F.R. 104.3(j)(2)(i) defines a physical or mental impairment as any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genito-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. The regulatory provision does not set forth an exhaustive list of specific diseases and conditions that may constitute physical or mental impairments because of the difficulty of ensuring the comprehensiveness of such a list.
> Major life activities, as defined in the Section 504 regulations at 34 C.F.R. 104.3(j)(2)(ii), include functions such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. (§ 104, 29 U.S.C. § 794)

This law requires public school districts to supply the necessary supports and supplementary aids so as to support the success of the student with a

handicapping condition.  Section 504 requires school districts to end

discrimination by offering its services to people with disabilities whose

handicapping condition does not meet the criteria for students' with disabilities

services.  "Section 504 protects students with disabilities from discrimination in

public schools throughout the United States.  Therefore all students with

disabilities who attend public school whether or not they are protected by the

IDEA, are protected under Section 504" (Yell, 2012, p. 117).

### No Child Left Behind Act  (2002)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law by President Bush

on Jan. 8, 2002, was a reauthorization of the [Elementary and Secondary

Education Act](), the central federal law in pre-collegiate education. The ESEA, first

enacted in 1965 and previously reauthorized in 1994, encompasses Title I, the

federal government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students.  At the

core of the No Child Left Behind Act were a number of measures designed to

drive broad gains in student achievement and to hold states and schools more

accountable for student progress.  The purpose of this Act is to ensure that all

children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality

education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic

achievement standards and state academic assessments (NCLB, 2002).

> Each school's progress will be measure with reading and math proficiency
> tests of all students.  The school will report on students by subgroup (i.e.,
> ethnicity, disability, English language learners, and low-income).  To meet
> the No Child Left Behind standard, all subgroups must make sufficient
> academic progress to ensure that all students are proficient by 2014.  If a

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school does not education any subgroup, the school will fail to meet this standard (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2004, p. 11).

Like Section 504 and IDEA, the No Child Left Behind Act does not mandate the inclusion of special needs students in the regular education classroom.  However Students with Disabilities is one of the disaggregated subgroups that is required to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as directed by the NCLB expectations.  According to NCLB, in order to make AYP all of a school's subgroups must be proficient.  This proficiency data is used to determine if school districts and schools make adequate yearly progress (20 U.S.C. § 6311).  Students with disabilities are a specific group or subgroup that is considered  often to be "left behind".  "Title I of NCLB specifies that students with disabilities will be assessed and schools, local districts, and states will need to report their results separately and establish annual performance targets for this group of students" (McLaughlin, p. 33).  School administrators need to know the policies and procedures regarding NCLB and what subgroups they have that will need to demonstrate AYP proficiency.

If a school's subgroup of students with disabilities does not make AYP, then it is the administrator's responsibility to see that these needs are addressed throughout the next school year so that the special education subgroup will meet AYP and the school will not be in a position to face NCLB sanctions.  In an effort to achieve AYP in the students with disabilities subgroup, many school districts are transitioning towards the inclusion of special needs students to ensure they

are exposed to the same rigorous general education curriculum as their non-disabled peers.  In order to meet these national, state, and local high standards, schools have to change the old way of educating special education students and begin the transition into the inclusionary environment.  Educators must focus on teaching and learning methods that use individualized approaches that focus on achieving high academic standards for all students.  Like IDEA and Section 504, the No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB does not mandate the inclusion of students with disabilities into the regular classroom.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is defined as "the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, in their neighborhood school, in age-appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplemental aids-for both children and teachers" (Lipsky & Gartner, 1994, p. 763).  This definition is dated, however it still addresses the spirit of what inclusion is.  This definition includes in everyday language what inclusion is meant to do.  Yell (2012) states that "inclusion refers to a placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities" (p. 310).

The aim of inclusion is to "include" special needs students in ways that will increase their capacity to learn by exposing them to the same rigorous curriculum as the regular education children (Ainscow, 1999; Dyson, Howes, & Roberts, 2002).  Inclusion is the process of identifying and overcoming barriers to learning

for all students.  Advocates for the inclusion of special needs students pose the promotion of inclusion will improve the achievement of all learners (Ainscow, 1991; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Skrtic, 1991).

The benefits of inclusion are many and the goal is to provide the special needs student with as many normal, inclusive experiences as their general education peers are afforded. According to a study listed on the Council for Exceptional Children' s website,

> In general, students with disabilities in inclusive settings have shown improvement in standardized tests, acquired social and communication skills previously undeveloped, shown increased interaction with peers, achieved more and high-quality IEP goals and are better prepared for post-school experiences. There is also evidence that inclusive settings can expand a student's personal interests and knowledge of the world, which is excellent preparation for adulthood

and children will not learn in segregated settings how to function in a non-disabled world. The real world is not divided into "regular" and "special" (Power-deFur and Orelove 2003).

Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis said, "Inclusive schools are places where students, regardless of ability, race, language and income, are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula and receive collaborative support to succeed. In inclusive schools, services and supports are brought directly to them" (2008, p. 24).

The rationale supporting inclusion has not rested on research findings, but on principle (Hines, 2001).  Several other experts espoused that pullout systems are not effective in remediating even mild learning disabilities.  They believe that teachers in regular classes provide effective instruction that is appropriate for all children and can accommodate individual differences, including those differences associated with special needs children (Reynolds & Wang, 1983; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1986).  Inclusion educators' primary responsibility for children with disabilities should be to help them establish friendships with non-disabled persons. Therefore, within that context, educators should help change normally developing children's stereotypical thinking about disabilities and help children with disabilities develop social skills, which, in turn will enable them to interact more effectively within an increasingly broad network of acquaintances, co-workers, family members and friends. Friendship making, attitude change and social skills development can only occur in regular classes, for the simple reason that these objectives require the presence of age-appropriate, non-disabled children (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998, p. 311)

The benefits of an inclusion program include:  it helps to facilitate a more appropriate social behavior of the special needs students because of the higher expectations of the students in the regular education classroom, it helps to promote levels of achievement that are higher, or at least as high as, those achieved in the self-contained classrooms, it offers social support because the

special needs students are included with their non-disabled peers, and it

improves the ability of all the students and teachers to adapt to different teaching

and learning styles and to more openly accept diversity (Kochhar, West, &

Taymans, 2000).

According to Fuchs & Fuchs (1998), "Children with special needs must be

placed in regular classrooms fulltime".  They go on to say that:

> There are two important reasons for doing so (including students in the
> regular classroom). First, only full-time placement confers legitimacy on
> special-needs children's place in regular classrooms. Constant coming
> and going between special and regular classes can make such children
> neither "fish nor fowl," highlighting their differences in the eyes of their
> peers. Second, there is a fear that as long as special education
> placements exist, educators will understand that there are "dumping
> grounds" for students who are especially difficult to teach. By eliminating
> special education placements, all classroom teachers will have no choice
> but to transform their classes into settings responsive to all children-
> including Title I, gifted and talented, and bilingual students (Fuchs &
> Fuchs, 1998, p. 311)

Inclusive education offers many benefits for both special education and

regular education students.  For special education students, instructional time

with non-disabled peers helps the students to learn strategies taught by the

teacher(s).  Teachers bring in different ways to teach a lesson for special needs

students and their non-disabled peers.  In this way, all of the students in the

classroom benefit from instructional practices.  The students can now learn from

the lesson how to help each other.  Socialization in the school allows the

students to learn communication skills and interaction skills from each other.

Students being able to help each other gives them a better learning environment (Ainscow, 2003).

The role of the principal has shifted from a managerial leader to an instructional leader in regards to moving toward making the change to inclusion. In order for inclusion to be successful, the principal must exhibit behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Sage & Burrello, 1994). When principals pay attention to particular initiatives, there will be a greater degree of implementation in the classroom (Fullan, 1992). Principals are now expected to design, lead, manage and implement programs for all students, including those with disabilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003); Sage & Burrello, 1994). In order for this form of leadership to occur, principals must begin to share responsibilities with teachers and other stakeholders in their school.

### Service Delivery for Inclusion

Several different types of collaborative teaching programs are used in supporting general education teachers who teach special education students: consulting teacher services and cooperative teaching in the classroom. The intent of each of these services is for staff to work collaboratively, and each service is viewed as an important means of supporting classroom teachers (Idol, 2006). For this study, the cooperative teacher model or co-teaching is the main

focus since co-teaching is the service delivery offered and observed in all case study locations.

## Cooperative Teacher Model

In a cooperative teaching model, special education and regular education classroom teachers work together with a variety of co-teaching arrangements in the same classroom to provide educational programs for all students (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989).  In this model, two or more teachers share instructional responsibility in a single classroom where all teachers share mutual ownership and joint accountability in meeting the needs of their students.  Co-teaching allows teachers to respond effectively to diverse needs of students and lower the teacher-student ratio.  It does not however include separating or grouping students with special needs into one part of the classroom. Collaboration is the key to effective co-teaching.  Co-teaching is a partnership where all teachers believe that it's "our" class, "our" room, "our" kids and it begins at the door.  Another teacher or professional should be able to walk into a co-taught classroom and not be able to determine which teacher is the regular education teacher and which teacher is the special education teacher. Furthermore, who the special education students are and are not should not be able to be determined.  In a true co-taught classroom, all students are integrated into the classroom curriculum and environment.

According to Marilyn Friend, co-teaching may be defined as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another

specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of

students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general

education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning

needs (Friend, 2008).

Friend also demonstrates "the essence of what occurs in co-taught

classes" is captured in Figure 1 (on the next page). That is, "co-teaching includes

the professionals planning and delivering instruction using six approaches and

variations of them, with selection based on student needs and instructional

intent" (Friend & Cook, 2010):
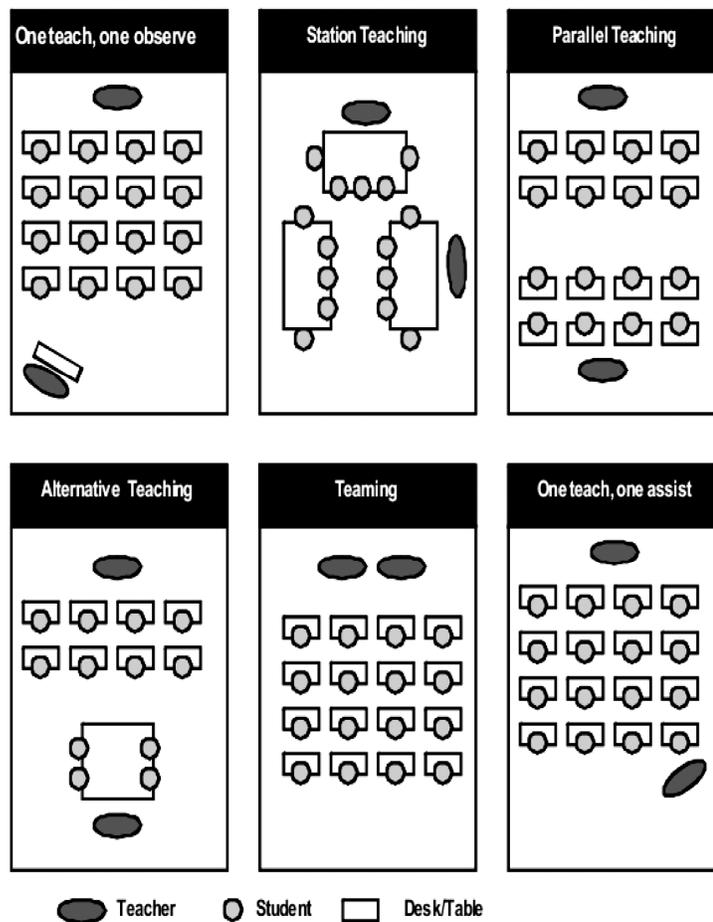
Figure 1. Co-Teaching Approaches. From M. Friend & W. D. Bursuck, 2009,
*Including Students With Special Needs: A Practical Guide for Classroom
Teachers* (5th ed., p. 92). Columbus, Ohio:  Merrill.

Friend's six approaches to co-teaching as referenced in the previous page:

1.One teach, one observe, in which one teacher leads large-group

instruction while the other gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on

specific students or the class group;

2. Station teaching, in which instruction is divided into three nonsequential

parts and students, likewise divided into three groups, rotate from station

to station, being taught by the teachers at two stations and working

independently at the third;

3. Parallel teaching, in which the two teachers, each with half the class

group, present the same material for the primary purpose of fostering

instructional differentiation and increasing student participation;

4. Alternative teaching, in which one teacher works with most students

while the other works with a small group for remediation, enrichment,

assessment, preteaching, or another purpose;

5. Teaming, in which both teachers lead large-group instruction by both

lecturing, representing opposing views in a debate, illustrating two ways

to solve a problem, and so on; and

6. One teach, one assist, in which one teacher leads instruction while the

other circulates among the students offering individual assistance.

 (Friend & Cook, 2010):

Friend goes on to discuss how using these six approaches to co-teaching,

students and teachers should benefit.

Within these six approaches, teachers address the individualized
education program (IEP) goals and objectives of students with disabilities
while at the same time meeting the learning needs of other students in the
class. The roles for the teachers are fluid, with each taking on any of the
responsibilities suggested by the aforementioned approaches and sharing
through appropriate negotiation the design and delivery of instruction and
the chores of teaching (Friend & Cook, 2010).

In January of 2007, the staff who would be creating, implementing and teaching in an inclusion classroom attended a professional development model on co-teaching called:  Improving Access to the General Curriculum for Students with Disabilities Through Collaborative Teaching.   This professional development module explored the components of the definition of co-teaching, how co-teaching looks in the classroom, scheduling and planning issues, and the challenge of supervising and evaluating a co-teaching team (Access Center, 2007).  Three of the most beneficial handouts are included over the next three pages.  The information provided on each of these handouts is utilized and referenced by teachers on a regular basis even now.  Therefore this researcher felt that including them as a resource would be beneficial for the reader to be able to discern different elements of co-teaching.  These handouts can be accessed at:  http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching/.

The following chart taken from http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching/  describes what co-teaching is and is not:

Figure 2. Co-Teaching:  What it IS, What it is NOT

There are five most common approaches to co-teaching.  They are:  one teaching, one drifting; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching.  The chart below outlines how design and instruction are utilized in these five co-teaching approaches:

**Co-Teaching Models Between General and Special Educators**

| | One Teaching, One Drifting | Station Teaching | Parallel Teaching | Alternative Teaching | Team Teaching |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Design | • Lead teacher models organization of the content.<br>• Lead teacher identifies skills and strategies needed for groups and individual students to complete the task(s) of the lesson.<br>• Support teacher assists. | • Lead teacher and support teacher segment the lesson content.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher divide the number of stations that they are responsible for.<br>• Both teachers plan and organize their station activities with attention to possible group differences. | • Lead teacher and support teacher collaboratively organize the lesson content.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher identify strategies needed for groups and individual students.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher divide the students into two groups. | • Lead teacher and support teacher make decisions about the content and organization of the lesson.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher determine the appropriate structures for alternative remedial or enrichment lessons that would promote learning. | • Lead teacher and support teacher make decisions about the content and organization of the lesson.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher teach simultaneously to the entire class. |
| Instruction | • Lead teacher conducts formal teaching.<br>• Support teacher teaches components of lessons with small groups of students.<br>• Support teacher provides content support to lead teacher's lesson. | • Lead and support teacher segment learning into small groups or for individual students at the stations they design. | • Lead teacher and support teacher independently deliver the lesson plan to each of the groups.<br>• Lead teacher and support teacher facilitate learning in their respective groups. | • Lead teacher conducts formal teaching.<br>• Support teacher implements supplemental activities for the entire group, small groups, or individual students before or after the formal lesson. | • Lead teacher and support teacher conduct formal teaching. |

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Figure 3. Co-Teaching Models Between General and Special Education

Making the transition to co-teaching won't just happen. Administrators and teachers must work together to develop a program that will meet the needs of their students. Below is a chart that gives administrators and teachers a guide to preparing to co-teach. There are several important and relevant questions that should be answered before a co-teaching plan is implemented.

**Handout 3**

**Preparing to Co-Teach**

| Actions | Questions to Ask Yourself or Others |
|---|---|
| **Assess the current environment** | • What type of collaboration currently exists between general and special education?<br>• Has there been any discussion of inclusion, collaboration, or co-teaching?<br>• How do teachers react when they hear about students with special needs in general education classes? Who reacts favorably? |
| **Move in slowly** | • What is our joint understanding of co-teaching as a service delivery model?<br>• May I co-teach a lesson with you?<br>• Are there any areas that you feel less strongly about, in which I might be able to assist? |
| **Involve the administration** | • How is the district addressing the least restrictive environment (LRE) mandate and the inclusive movement?<br>• Would our school site be willing to be proactive by including co-teaching?<br>• What discipline areas will we target first?<br>• How will we ensure that support is provided across all content areas, including electives?<br>• Would we be able to count on administrative support, especially with co-planning time and scheduling assistance? |
| **Get to know your partner** | • Could we complete a co-teaching checklist to help guide us in discussing our personal and professional preferences?<br>• Are there any pet peeves or issues that I should know prior to us working together?<br>• Do we both have similar levels of expertise about the curriculum and instructing students with disabilities?<br>• How shall we ensure that we are both actively involved and neither feels over- or underutilized?<br>• What feedback structure can we create to assist in our regular communications? |
| **Create a workable schedule** | • How often will co-teaching occur (daily, a few times a week, for a specific unit, etc.)?<br>• What schedule would best meet the needs of the class and both teachers?<br>• How can we ensure that this schedule will be maintained consistently so that both co-teachers can trust it?<br>• How will we maintain communication between co-taught sessions? |

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Figure 4. Preparing to Co-Teach

All of the preceding co-teaching handouts can be accessed at:

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching/

## Leadership

The role of the principal has evolved from being just a managerial leader to an instructional leader.  Principals now "have to redefine their roles in ways that promote positive results for students with disabilities through evidence-based instruction" (Boscardin, 2005, p. 23).  According to Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, principals are the instructional leaders for all students rather than

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building level managers for general education (2003, p. 233). Boscardin also

goes on to say that administrators who promote knowledge-based decisions and

evidenced-based instruction to solve educational problems will evoke better

educational outcomes for students and improved instructional practices for

teachers (2005, p. 28).

> Principals have five leadership priorities that are crucial for the implementation of special education programs. These priorities are: (a) defining and communicating the school's vision/mission, (b) managing/monitoring curriculum and instruction, (c) supporting and supervising teachers, (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) promoting a learning climate (Bateman & Bateman, 2001).

These priorities keep principal focused on student learning and professional

development according to DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003, p. 8). For the

purpose of this study, the principal's re-definition of leadership includes:

visionary leadership, operations management, instructional leadership, and

advocacy.

**Visionary Leadership**

Visionary leadership includes beliefs and attitudes for the future. These

beliefs and attitudes shape a shared vision as well as missions, goals, and

strategies. The principal is a key factor in developing the school's vision as well

as the vision of what services for students with disabilities will look like. "Today's

school administrator must be a leader who promotes the success of all students,

including those with disabilities, by facilitation the development and

implementation of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community" (McLaughlin, 2009, p. 81).

Chance and Grady (1990) said that "Principals have a vision of what their schools can be and the goals that can be achieved" (p. 17).  Gameros (1995) suggested, "that vision should include educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE)" (p. 15).  Gameros also stated that visionary principals accept the challenge to create an inclusive environment for all students.  Stainback and Stainback (1989) stated, "As an inclusive principal, they accept the ownership of all students, support inclusive placement decisions, promote the policy that students with disabilities are the responsibility of all school personnel and work to ensure an effective environment for all students" (p. 17).

Attitudinal, organizational and instructional changes are necessary for successful inclusion, with the principal a key player in the change process-"a primary change agent" (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998, p. 181).

> Visionary leaders need courage to take on the role of principal change agent, to set the intellectual and interpersonal tone of the school, and to shape the organizational conditions under which the school community works…No change is easy and most change is met with some resistance. (p. 21)

Waldron (2002) contends that when developing and implementing inclusive schools, the principal "must set an atmosphere that is conducive to change and must provide teachers with a range of substantive supports" (p. 66).

Principals must be knowledgeable in all areas of special education

programming to first develop a vision, and second to communicate a vision of

how services for students with disabilities will be delivered.  The principal is

responsible for creating a learning climate that gives nondisabled and disabled

students opportunities to interact.  Sufficient training opportunities for principals

are crucial for this to happen.  Patterson, Bowling and Marshall (2000) found that

principals are ill-trained for inclusion and special education leadership.  This lack

of training can have a devastating impact on the success of special education

programming.  According to Burrello, Lashley, and Beatty (2001), there are eight

essential questions that guide a unified system of leadership that principals

should consider when developing the vision, mission, and program development

for their schools.  These essential questions are:

1. What is the purpose of education?  What are we trying to achieve for all students?
2. What is school success, and how is it measured for all students?  How do we demonstrate success for students with special needs?  What standards are we being held accountable for that measure achievement, personal/social growth, and post-school success?  How are students with special needs performing compared to their typical peers?
3. What do we envision students with special needs doing in school to prepare for post-school life?  How is their education more the same than different from their typical peers?
4. In what ways are general education staff responsible for educating all students including those with special needs?  How are special educators held accountable for assisting general educators in meeting their responsibility to educate all students?  How can special education personnel ever be perceived as equal by their peers, if they're not being held accountable for student performance as their peers are?
5. How do we as educators justify our practice?  How do special services personnel impact the capacity of staff and schools to educate students

with diverse needs?  Are their practices meritorious?  Do the practices demonstrate worth in the minds of others?

6. What framing policies and practices need to be in place to support the concept of a unified system that includes all students including those with special needs?  How are they aligned with other district and state policies?  Can the protection and due process procedures needed to ensure parental and student rights be understood and used successfully by school level leadership without the direct intervention of district personnel?

7. Does the leadership in the district support school-level planning and problem-solving that lead to generative learning?  Are the minimum specifications clear so that the school site teams can plan, design, and implement appropriate programs of study for all students with special needs?

8. What are we learning as educators, and how are we sharing that learning with all staff and the community at large? (p. 11-12)

Burrello and Zadnik (1986) categorized administrator competencies in special education into three broad domains:  a basic knowledge of special education, a working knowledge of related laws, and a working knowledge of best practices.  Recently, how well principals know and understand IDEA was added to these competencies.  A principal cannot supervise, monitor, or evaluate special education programs without a basic knowledge of special education.  McLaughlin (2009) stated that "principals who are effective leaders of special education need to understand five key principles."  They are:

1. Principals must understand the core special education legal foundations or elements.  They should understand the underlying intent or rationale behind specific procedures.  Principals who make the critical distinction between a student with a disability who is eligible to receive special education and one who is not.

2. Principals need to understand that effective special education matches instruction to the learning characteristics of students with disabilities.  Neither disability labels nor categories provide the information necessary to create that match.

3. Principals must understand that special education is not a place nor a program. At the level of the school, special education is a set of services and supports that is provided to individual students to give them access to curriculum and to ensure that they continually learn and progress in that curriculum.
4. Principals must know how to meaningfully include students with disabilities in assessments and new accountability systems.
5. Principals need to know how to create the schoolwide conditions that support effective special education. (p. 3)

Effective administrators need to develop a working knowledge about disabilities and the unique learning and behavioral challenges various conditions present. They need a thorough understanding of the laws that protect the education rights of students with disabilities. With a solid understanding of IDEA and NCLB, principals cannot administer special education programs effectively (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; NAESP, 2001a; Valente, 1998).

Burrello (1988) provided guidelines for supervisors of special education relative to their role as the cultural leader including that the attitude of the building principal helps determine the attitude of the staff toward the special education program. He also suggested the importance of communicating the value of a shared responsibility for all students, setting high expectations that all students can learn, and a willingness to learn about individual differences as part of the role of the principal. According to DiPaola and Thomas (2003), "principal functions are linked to student achievement; effective principals developed learning communities that emphasized high academic standards and expectations, shared leadership and collaboration, continuity of high-quality instructional programs, and effective communication" (p. 7). Together with all

stakeholders, principals develop child-centered communities that are based on

shared values and beliefs, a coherent vision of the future, and a mission to

educate all students well (Lipp, 1992). These "students in the margins" as

described by Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty (2001),

> challenge the curriculum and its standards, the teacher's normal
> instruction routines, and the motivational strategies that stimulate learning
> and compliance in the classroom. They present educators with a grand
> opportunity to create new learning for themselves and examine their
> invitation to learning for all students. (p. 2)

The principal's values and supportive actions, as mediated by overall

school culture, influence special educators' sense of administrative support and

confidence in their own ability to make a difference in the academic lives of

students (Billingsley, 1993; Brownell & smith, 1993; Carlson & Billinglsey, 2001;

Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002).

Having discussed what visionary leadership in inclusive schools should

look like, in the next section, the discussion will focus on operations management

which includes the management of resources, and the production of quality

goods and services which in this context is student services.

**Operations Management**

Operations management involves planning, scheduling, producing,

efficiency and effectiveness. Principals as operations managers are also

responsible for quality control, materials, and purchasing. In regards to the

operations management issues of implementing an inclusion program, strong

administrative leadership is a key element.  Examples of strong administrative leadership have knowledge of students with disabilities policies and procedures as well as developing an environment that supports communication and collaboration.  Principals need to ensure that special education students, teachers, and services are fully integrated into the vision and the ongoing operations of their school (McLaughlin, 2009).  All those involved in any change process must have the skills necessary to effect the change.

Resources are vital pieces in managing change.  It is important that the principal realize that the people in the school (teachers, staff, etc.) are the school's greatest resource.  Resource allocation is an important element of student success.  In some cases, this involves rethinking the basics from the past and reinvent processes for the future.  Don't reinvent the wheel, just make it turn more efficiently.

Due process procedures for evaluation, development of IEPs, and placement decisions are topics that need to be addressed for a school's special education program to be effective.  Therefore, it is crucial for principals to have a basic knowledge of special education law and policy.  Bateman and Bateman (2001) discussed the role of the principal in the implementation of federal regulations related to students with disabilities.  Specifically, they identified the need for principals to have training in the IEP and the role of the principal in the process of facilitating IEPs.  As effective managers, principals should be able to

identify needs and find appropriate resources (DiPaola, Moran, & Thomas, 2004).

Bateman and Bateman (2001) suggested questions principals need to keep in mind in determining whether a student's education is appropriate and the process is correct:

1. Was the child evaluated in a nondiscriminatory fashion?

2. Is everybody certified for his/her role in the development and implementation of the IEP?

3. Is the IEP individualized?

4. Are the necessary related services listed?

5. Are all the components for services listed on the IEP being implemented?

6. Is there clear documentation on the level of functioning of the child with a disability in comparison to the goals and objectives on the IEP?

7. Is the child receiving educational benefit from the program?

8. Are all the objectives of the IEP described in measurable terms?

9. Have the parents/guardians been involved in every step of the development of the IEP?

10. Have the parents/guardians been notified in writing of their due process rights?

11. Is the student integrated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent possible?

12. If there is no provision for integration, is there a plan for the future integration of the student with students who do not have disabilities? (p. 13)

The IDEA provides an elaborate system of due process safeguards to ensure that students with disabilities are properly identified, evaluated, and placed according to the procedures outlined in the act (20 U.S.C. § 1415). These safeguards are designed to make parents equal partners with school officials in the education of their children (Osborne & Russo, 2003). The parents or guardians of a child with disabilities must be provided with the opportunity to participate in the development of their child's IEP (300 C.F.R. § 345). The IDEA regulations assure that school officials will take no action without parental knowledge by requiring parental consent prior to an evaluation or initial placement (34 C.F.R. § 300.505(a)(1)) and proper notice before any change in placement is initiated after the original placement has been made (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(3)).

The IDEA requires that procedures be established to ensure that all children with disabilities are properly identified and evaluated (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a) (3)). The evaluation process needs to be multidisciplinary; that is no single procedure can be the sole criterion for determining eligibility or placement (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a) (6)). Eligibility decisions are made by a group of qualified professionals and the parent of a child (34 C.F.R. § 300.534(a) (1)). The evaluation also must be individualized (34 C.F.R. § 300.531).

Operations management involves the "management" of resources and services in regards to student productivity. This involves strategies for improvement that meet the specific needs in a school. It also involves assuring that the school is fully in compliance with regulations that govern school operations.

Administrative leadership is a powerful predictor of positive teacher attitudes in schools as they implement inclusive education practices for students with disabilities, and this has a strong effect on almost all the critical aspects of special education teachers working conditions (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001, p. 557). In the next section, instructional leadership will be discussed.

**Instructional Leadership**

Principals must create schools where all students can achieve their full potential. This involves high quality instruction, and a continuum of services that meets the specific needs of students. Therefore, the principal must be the instructional leader of the school. He/she must continue to learn about and encourage the implementation of instructional innovations for all students, not just those in regular education or special education.

Principals need a basic knowledge of special education and best practices in order to support, supervise, and evaluate the teachers who are serving the exceptional students. Otherwise, there can be no effective change in the instructional program for exceptional students. Research has demonstrated that

principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for others at risk for school failure (DiPaola & Thomas, 2003, p. 9).  Brennan and Brennan (1988) urged principals to develop a deeper understanding of the goals, needs and motivation of those involved in special education and to be guided by "situation ethics" (p. 15).

Trust between the principal and teacher is an important element in effective instructional leadership.  Zadnik (1992) found that the behaviors of instructional supervisors of special education were characterized by the observation of a lesson, drawing conclusions, presenting a critical analysis, and telling the teacher how to improve.  Perhaps a more facilitative role by the principal could be more effective as long as a basic knowledge of special education is still evident.

Consistencies within curriculum and instruction need to be a focus of the overall educational program at our schools.  Grade levels, departments, and specialists need to work together with special education staff to plan and develop good quality learning experiences that include all students while meeting the needs of students with disabilities.  Principals are better prepared to provide adequate support for teachers and students when they understand the needs of special education students.  "Leaders understand the importance of well-designed learning and working environments and can facilitate the development

of appropriate student placements and specialist assignments that represent student and classroom support needs accurately" (DiPaola & Thomas, 2003, p. 9).

Creating a vision and allocating resources are integral parts of developing effective instructional practices and services.  In the next section , advocacy will be discussed which should result from visionary leadership, effective management, and strong instructional practices.

As the instructional leaders in their building, principals are responsible for developing a school culture that embraces high academic standards and expectations for all students (Boyer & Lee, 2001).  Good leaders foster working relationships based on trust, shared responsibility, collaboration, and teamwork. They are personally invested in providing their students with comprehensive, high-quality instructional programs that are firmly grounded in educational research (Barth et al, 1999; Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Crockett, 2002; NAESP, 2001a, 2001b).

Instructional leaders need to know and model the knowledge and skills needed to develop and implement inclusion practices in the regular education classroom.  This includes knowledge about the improvement of instruction (Elmore, 2002).  By doing this, the role of the principal is transformed from the command-and-control style of leadership that assumes followers must be bribed to that of assuming the commitment of the followers.  The instructional leader asks questions often, refers to the knowledgeable people on a particular subject,

keeps the team informed, and provides training and support while establishing clear benchmarks (Schlechty, 1997).

Senge (1990) refers to this form of capacity building as creating a "learning organization," in that it is an organization that is expanding its capacity to create its future by continually seeking to develop and refine its responses to the challenges it meets. Through this change process, steady, deepening improvement helps to build capacity and assurance in the organization. Building leadership also affects the extent to which teachers use proven, research-based practices to improve student performance (Embich, 2001; Noell & Witt, 1999). When school leaders focus on fundamental instructional issues, demonstrate strong support for special education, and provide ongoing professional development, academic outcomes for students with disabilities and others at risk improve (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2003; Kearns, Kleinert, Clayton, Burdge, & Williams, 1998; Klingner, Arguelles, Hughes, & Vaughn, 2001).

The change toward inclusion should be supported with adequate and relevant professional development. Teachers both regular education and special education must have access to this professional development and support in order for them to buy into the move toward inclusion.

# Advocacy

Advocacy is supporting processes that influence student success.  In terms of education, advocacy is looking at "what is" currently in process and practice to change or improve into "what should be" best practices to encourage student success.  In an age of accountability, it is important for there to be equity and balance in regards to effective special education services.

Administrators should empower their special education staff to provide a consistent continuum of services.  Regular school staff should be empowered as well to participate and do their part in the education of students with disabilities. "Unifying special and general education programs entails changing the nature of work relationships and instructional interactions of the faculty, staff, and administration; collaboration is a means of addressing the needs of all students in unified schools and classrooms and to improving the work life and morale of school personnel." (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001, p. 122).

Teacher training is an important factor in the success of special education programming.  Most school districts are utilizing the inclusion model for special education instruction.  Dyal, et al., (1996) suggested there is evidence to support the content of professional development of teachers that principals should provide, including "Areas where principals need to focus more attention: acquainting the teachers with PL 94-142 and its provision, increasing classroom visitations, more attention to scheduling and serving on the placement committee" (p. 9).  Principals also need to demonstrate a commitment to provide

an equitable learning opportunity for special education students.  Four ways to demonstrate this commitment are:

1.   Attending and participating in all IEP meetings

2.   Asking questions about how students are doing

3.   Providing positive reinforcement when students with disabilities are working effectively

4.   Providing positive reinforcement when special education teachers and other staff are working together to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 88).

Bateman & Bateman (2001) give some ideas for principals to consider when developing special education programs.  Some ideas are:  Begin by sharing your ideals for serving all of the students in your school and community. Include those teachers/staff who will be involved in the inclusion process to contribute their ideas regarding the process.  Develop a school mission, a vision, and belief statements with your staff.  The vision and mission should be inclusive of all students, and staff should be clear on what their role is in the vision and mission.

Principals should provide resources to staff, including books, consultants, articles, speakers, etc.  Investigate teacher training and staff development opportunities that focus on improving skills.  Workshops on collaboration,

cooperative learning, teaming, assessment, adaptations, strategy instruction, and content enhancement would be beneficial.

Work hard to develop workable schedules for the staff, allowing for collaborative planning time daily. Common planning time should be scheduled to include regular education and special education staff as well as administrators or any other support staff involved in students' service delivery. Ensure that the IEP promotes inclusion and focuses on the needs of the child. Keep the tasks and goals as age appropriate as possible. Continually ask whether the student's skills can be enhanced and supported in a regular education setting. Ensure that all of the teachers and support staff know their roles and the expectations set forth in the IEP. Do not be fearful of trying inclusive activities for the child. Plan to observe each student in the classroom before the child IEP meeting so that you have some first-hand knowledge of the child. Try to be involved with students who have disabilities and with their families as early in the process as possible by attending IEP meetings. Listen to the student's family and make sure that the IEP reflects the family's priorities and goals. Never say "never," never say "always," and never say "We don't do that here." " You are in a stronger position if you have tried to meet the needs of the family and child by documenting that you have tried to implement a program in an inclusive setting." (p. 9-10).

This literature review included what is known about special education law and policy, program delivery methods, and best practices for implementation.

Discussion regarding special education law and policy included IDEA, Section

504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and NCLB.  Program delivery methods and

best practices for implementation referenced inclusion and co-teaching.  The

principal's re-definition of leadership includes:  visionary leadership, operations

management, instructional leadership, and advocacy.

Chapter III is the methodology and focuses on the purpose of this study

and offers an overview of the design of the study.

**CHAPTER III**

**METHODOLOGY**

In the previous chapter, an overview of the research literature used to design this study was presented to include the ideas that offer impetus to the study.  Written documentation obtained from central office and one school site were summarized to demonstrate what inclusion and co-teaching programs for special education students look like.  Information presented in Chapter II offers insight into how principals, teachers and central office staff efforts of collaboration affect how inclusion programs will be developed and implemented.  Chapter III focuses on the purpose of this study and offers an overview of the design of the study.  Research questions, research design, instrumentation, participant sampling procedures, data collection techniques, and data analysis techniques will also be presented in Chapter III.

**Research Questions**

The following were the research questions for the study:

1. From a cultural, policy, and implementation perspective, how do principals support personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) who work together to develop and implement a special education inclusion program?

2. What are the factors in principal preparation and professional development programs that influence principals' perspectives and perceptions of special education?

3. How do principals establish a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are implementing inclusion programs?

## Research Design

Using the three research questions as a foundation, this study used a qualitative, case study research approach to investigate the perceptions that principals, teachers (both regular education and special education), and central office support staff have on developing and implementing special education inclusion programs in their schools. Glesne (2011) says that a case study "involves in-depth and often longitudinal examination with data gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document collection and analysis. The write-up is often descriptive and holistic, rather than thematic" (p. 22). Creswell's (1998) definition of a case study is "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). This case is a "bounded system by time (data collection) and places (several campuses)" (p. 37). A single program (special education inclusion) was selected as the purpose of this study.

The case study offers insights into the phenomenon being studied. In this case, principal's roles in implementing inclusion programs for special education

students.  Stake (2000) indicates that the goal of the case study is to offer a deeper awareness about the subject, which may in turn influence practice. Merriam (2001) argues that "case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations for evaluating programs and for informing practice" (p. 41).  This insight is helpful for researchers, school districts, principals, and teachers when analyzing current special education or inclusion programs in that it has the potential to inspire and inform prospective program development in order to improve the service delivery for special education students in the regular classroom.

As qualitative research is able to offer an awareness from the participants' perspective, the use of qualitative research for this investigation conveyed a specific understanding of the perceived role of principals in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program.  Glesne (2011) says that "using relevant literature and existing studies will show what is known about  general area of inquiry and what is missing" (p. 32).  Glatthorn (1998) points out that qualitative inquiry emphasizes a phenomenological view, whereby the substance of the research is inherent with the perceptions of the individual participants.

Creswell (1994) states that single stage sampling is having "access to names in the population" (p. 119) and directly sampling the population.  In this case study a multiple-sampling process was employed.  Access to the participants was convenient, because I as the principal researcher was working at one of the school sites included in this study.  The design of this study, which

is a qualitative participant-observer methodology, employed appropriate forms of research involving human instruments, that is a medium through which the data was compiled and interpreted.  Creswell (1998) points out that, "A case study involves the widest array of data collection as the research attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case" (p. 123).  Interviews, observations, and field notes were the principal methods used to collect data in this study in order to develop an effective and comprehensive narrative of understanding the perceived role of principals in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program.

### Interviews, Observations and Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews, observations and field-notes from classroom observations were utilized as data collection tools to assure that a reliable qualitative study was accomplished.  Through these methods I was able to observe, examine and analyze the specific situations and experiences of the teachers and students in the school settings.  There is an abundance of research on special education law and policy and how schools and districts must adhere to law when implementing programs for special education students.

The semi-structured questions during the interview process enabled subjects to introduce and reflect on issues that are of interest and value to them in regards to program delivery.  The very nature of this type of questioning facilitates critical analysis of the subjects' own experiences and raises questions about the habits and beliefs they form.  Researchers such as Keyes, 2000; Henson, 1996; Oja & Pine, 1989 have argued that teachers (and principals) who

are involved in inquiry are likely to become more reflective, more critical and analytical in their teaching practices. That is, they develop the ability to become more candid and readily seek out professional development opportunities. In addition, they are more apt to be conscious of the decisions they make having an effect on service delivery.

## Subjects Reflections and Perceptions

As the subjects developed their own accounts, they were able to reflect on their experiences, training, and learning. In addition, they were thoughtful in reworking and reframing some of the challenges they had previously and continue to face. They discussed what they would have done differently if given the opportunity and clearly developed as thoughtful professionals and learners. They used time and reflection to reframe events from their experiences and perceptions so that they were able to make greater sense of their experiences and of their reactions to those experiences. This was evident in the manner in which they answered the interview questions. We learn much about the participants in this case study as their stories unfold. They share details about their personal lives, their upbringings, conceptual frames of reference, and they highlight concerns important to every aspect of meeting the needs of special education students. Included in these concerns are issues about belief systems about inclusion, the involvement of the principal in implementing inclusion, relationships between the principal and teachers, professional development, collaboration, and feelings or perceptions of being supported.

A voice recorder was used during the interviews, but the line of questioning had to be flexible as I felt that several of the questions would lead to additional insights and perceptions. I wanted the interviews to develop from stories and experiences from the participant's lives in their own words. Even though participants were given specific interview questions, they were encouraged to expound on their answers and perhaps "go off on a tangent" to gain valuable information of their true perceptions.

Audio-taping the interview, according to Sagor (2000, p. 107) "frees you from the need to take notes and allows you to make the interviewee more comfortable with eye contact and interaction. It also gives you a verbatim account for later use in analysis."

I learned from participants their perceptions about current inclusion practices in their school, what was done to facilitate the change to inclusion, if/how the principal shared and communicated their vision on inclusion to relevant members, teachers' perceptions of the special education knowledge of their principal, the importance of fostering collaboration, the importance of specific and relevant professional development, and how the principal "included" teachers in the inclusion implementation process. As Weiss states, "Being a good interviewer requires knowing what kind of information the study needs and being able to help the respondent provide it" (Weiss, 1994, p. 66). I consider that my interview questions provided the type of information that was needed for my research.

**Participant Follow Up and Clarification**

In order to "provide an opportunity for participants to make additional comments…Try to separate fact from fiction by asking follow-up questions." (Sagor 2000, p. 106). At the end of a participant's answer to a question, I asked for specific examples or asked them to clarify their response. I did not use a formal template of follow-up questions, rather used my inquisition to gather more clarified insight into their true perceptions of the original questions. I used prompts to clarify certain points and gain additional evidence and data such as those suggested by Weiss (1994):

> Sometimes the best question is one that in a very few words directs the respondent to give more detail for fill in a gap: 'What happened then?'…'Could you give me a concrete instance of that, a time that actually happened, with as much detail as you can?' Any question that helps the respondent produce the material you need is a good question (p. 73)

**Bias**

All forms of evidence are subject to distortion and bias of a conscious or unconscious nature. Some people may be inclined to say what they think the researcher wants to hear. However, this was not evident in the interviews that were conducted for this study. The participants spoke freely in the relaxed private atmosphere of the room/office used for my interview purposes. I was interested in documenting the participants' perceptions, opinions, feelings, memories, beliefs, and data that were not observable in any objective manner, which Baldwin (2000) refers to as "information no one else knows" (p. 3).

It seems clear too, that it is not possible in any study of controversial social issues entirely to suppress the author's personal views, however great his or her efforts at scholarly objectivity. One cannot but endeavor to set down the evidence with as little bias as is humanly possible; but it may be just as well to face these limitations and to state them beforehand with all honesty. I was aware that I had to monitor my subjectivity in order for it not to affect the data. As Peshkin (1988) points out, "I do rather enable myself to manage it-to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome-as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data" (p. 20). I was mindful of my subjectivity throughout, as I did not want it to go unnoticed as I transcribed the data. I was aware of it at all times during the process and considered what Peshkin calls "its enabling potential" (Peshkin, 1998, p. 18).

Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is crucial for the audience to understand the researcher's position. Fundamentally this highlights any biases or assumptions that are likely to affect the inquiry (Merriam, 1988). Creswell affirms this belief stating that through the process of clarification "the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (p. 202). Therefore, at this stage it seems appropriate that a discussion of my role as a researcher is made clear.

My background as a school guidance counselor together with my undergraduate training in Psychology has reinforced the belief that it is

imperative for one to recognize bias and be aware of one's own subjectivity. I consider this to be particularly crucial in this study because I have experienced some of the same issues in the past that participants shared with me during the process of data collection. I feel that the nature of my training and experience has allowed me to be more considerate of other people's viewpoints, and therefore I feel that no assumptions were evident on my part.

In addition, I considered the unique situation and the relationships that I had formed with the participants at one of the schools both as a researcher and a colleague. I realized that there were many variables that could potentially affect my analysis of the experiences of the participants. According to Creswell (1998), the researcher must approach a qualitative study with specific philosophical assumptions and implications for practice. In terms of the epistemological assumptions that the researcher brings to bear on the study Creswell poses the question "What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?" (p. 75). In addition, Creswell believes that the epistemological characteristics of the philosophical assumption is evident as the researcher tries to decrease the distance between him/herself and the research. Creswell offers an example of the implications for practice when he states that the "researcher collaborates, spends time in the field with participants, and becomes an 'insider' (p. 75).

## Personal Background and Experience

At the time my research was conducted I was serving as a middle school guidance counselor at one of the case study sites in the district where this research took place. Reflecting on my own experiences as the School Referral Coordinator and my coursework in School Administration enabled me as a researcher to understand the particular experiences of implementing an inclusion program. I believe that in the course of my particular training in referring students who may be disabled and my many elective courses in areas of special education gave me a richer understanding of what an inclusion program and co-teaching classroom should be. Currently I am an Assistant Principal in a neighboring school district and serve as the LEA representative at IEP meetings and other meetings or staff training that involves students with disabilities.

## Questions Posed to the Participants

This case study examined the principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program. In order to reveal a rich and holistic cultural portrait of the teachers, the participants were asked demographic questions that were not included on the formal participant interview questionnaire. Questions at this time asked participants how long they have been an educator, what is their background (i.e., subjects taught, division/level, or positions held), how long have they been in the current county, and how did the inclusion program come about at their current school.

The next questions were taken from a formal questionnaire that participants were given a copy to reference. This questionnaire contained eighteen open-ended questions. During the course of answering, participants may have been given additional open-ended questions to fill in gaps and clarify their perceptions.

Below are the questions included in the open-ended questionnaire:

1. What are your feelings about inclusion?

2. What type of environment do you feel is best for students with disabilities?

3. What actions were done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices?

4. Do you feel the school culture is better or worse because of inclusion?

5. How did the principal (you) share his/her (your) vision on inclusion?

6. What do you perceive the principal's knowledge of special education procedure and policy to be?

7. How would you describe your principal's (your) level of involvement in meeting the needs of special education students?

8. Has the relationships between teachers and administration changed as a result of the implementation of an inclusion program?

9. Is fostering collaboration between teachers and administration seen to be important with regards to implementing inclusionary practices?

10. What types of professional development have you participated in with regard to implementing inclusionary practices?

11. Have you facilitated the professional development?

12. How does the building level principal (you) facilitate professional development?

13. What is your role in the inclusive process at your school?

14. Does a special education teacher come into the regular classroom? Do the classrooms use a co-teaching method for instruction?

15. What is the most important factor you would attribute to the success of the implementation of inclusive practices in this school?

16. How important was the principal's (your) role in managing the change to inclusion?

17. What changes, if any, would you make to the current inclusion implementation practices at your school?

18. What is your perception of your role in implementing inclusionary practices in this school?

As the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived and actual principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program, generalizability is limited. Merriam (1998) points out that, "In qualitative research, a single case (inclusion) or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 208). Thus, no generalizations have been based on this information and it is recognized that sample studies only provide an incomplete indication of the scale of the

question under study.  It is recognized that the sample here is not large enough to be statistically valid.

## The Participants

One school system in the southeast was contacted in order to seek permission to participate in this study.  It is the fourth largest school district in the state serving more than 55,000 students.  The third largest employer in a 12-county area, the school district employs more than 7,600 people, including about 4,040 classroom and part-time teachers.  The school system has 80 total schools:  42 elementary schools, 15 middle schools 11 high schools and 12 special schools.

The school district was chosen for this study because the school I worked at during the course of data collection was in this district.  In addition, it was chosen because the middle school division had just been "loosely mandated" to develop and implement full inclusion programs utilizing a co-teaching approach.

The aim of the research was to analyze perceptions of the principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program.  It involved exploring how participants' perceptions of the role of the principal lined up with the reality of the role of the principal in implementing an inclusion program.

After completing the University's Institutional Review board (IRB) application form, an identical copy was sent to the applicable school district's Research Review Committee for approval.  To ensure confidentiality, the participants, the school district, as well as the chosen school sites, are referred to

by pseudonyms. A further meeting was set up with the school principals so that approval to use their school in the study could be obtained.

## The School Settings

According to Creswell (1998), the context of the case involves situating the case within its setting. Therefore the contextual material such as background information, demographics and similar statistical data provided by the school administrator and the school district offer useful insight to the nature and foundation of the four schools selected for use in this study. There were four middle schools selected for use in this study. They are: Salem Middle School, Hawk Middle School, Bagley Middle School, and Sprague Middle School.

Salem Middle School is located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 1,138 students in grades 6-8. The average class size ranges from 24-28 students. Approximately 29% of special education students enrolled in Salem Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests. There are 66 classroom teachers; 97% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified. Salem Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 7%. At the time this study was conducted, all special education service delivery was utilized in a co-taught inclusion classroom. There was no resource or self-contained special education classes on their campus.

Hawk Middle School is also located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 759 students in grades 6-8. The average class size ranges from 23-25 students. Approximately 25% of special education students

enrolled in Hawk Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests.  There are 51 classroom teachers; 95% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified.  Hawk Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 8%.  At the time this study was conducted, all special education service delivery was utilized in a co-taught inclusion classroom.  There was no resource or self-contained special education classes on their campus.

Bagley Middle School is also located in a rural and suburban area on the outskirts of a more urban area.  Their approximate enrollment is 762 students in grades 6-8.  The average class size ranges from 18-20 students.  Approximately 14% of special education students enrolled in Bagley Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests.  There are 56 classroom teachers; 100% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified. Bagley Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 20%.  At the time this study was conducted, only a small number of special education classes were full inclusion, co-taught classes.  Bagley Middle School continued to have a resource class for each grade as well as one self-contained class.

Sprague Middle School is also located in an urban and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 286 students in grades 6-8.  The average class size ranges from 16-18 students.  Approximately 11% of special education students enrolled in Sprague Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests.  There are 31 classroom teachers; 97% are fully licensed and 100% are highly qualified.  Sprague Middle School has an

approximate teacher turnover rate of 23%.  At the time this study was conducted, it is unknown the exact service delivery options offered by Sprague Middle School.

It is important to note here that ultimately Sprague Middle School was not included in data collection.  At that time, the principal of Sprague Middle School was offered a principal position at a newly constructed middle school effective immediately.  Therefore, there was not another school official or staff member who was willing to work with me to schedule the process there.  Due to those unforeseen circumstances, I was not able to observe and interview participants at Sprague Middle School.

## Data Collection Techniques

In order to gain an extensive awareness of the principal's role in the implementation of a Middle school inclusion program a semi-structured interview was developed for use with the participants.  Qualitative research uses appropriate procedures for collecting empirical data.  These methods vary between observations and fieldwork to interviews and questionnaires.  Thomas and Brubaker (2000) explain that interviews enable individuals to release facts about themselves in terms of their lives and perspectives they have about specific issues and situations and morals and values they hold.

Creswell (1998) argues that "for one-on-one interviewing, the researcher needs individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas and needs to determine a setting in which this is possible" (p. 124).  The data collection

techniques used in this study were intended to be as unobtrusive as possible for the participants.  It was my intention to respect the position of each participant, yet I wanted the interview questions to be thought provoking and see it as a reflective activity.  Since a focus of this study was to examine perceptions, the structure of the interview questions had to be open-ended.  Although the interview questions had common elements, specific questions were designed to elicit information regarding participants' perceptions of implementing inclusion at their school as well as the reality of what had or will take place when implementing an inclusion program.  The semi-structured interview offered the same questions to each participant.  However, it was designed to allow for discussion of data unique to each participant.  This approach ensured that there were no restrictions placed on each of the participants as they answered the interview questions.

**Confidentiality**

To ensure participant confidentiality, I as the principal investigator met individually with each participant whereby the participants' approval could be obtained.  An oral presentation was given each time and then each participant signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the research.  These consent forms explained the purpose of the study and the fact that the participants' responses and identities would remain confidential.  I also guaranteed the participants' anonymity prior to conducting the interviews.  I believe that the participants shared their true feelings and perceptions as I abided by this.

Additionally participants were also advised that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and they were also notified of their option to withdraw from the study at any time. Dates and times were arranged at each school site and with each participant so that the formal interviews could take place. To ensure an impartial setting whereby participants felt sufficiently secure to offer their perceptions, all participants were asked if they were comfortable to be interviewed in the location that had been reserved at each school site. Each principal at each school site had graciously allowed the participants to be interviewed during the school day during their planning times.

**Interview Logistics**

I as the principal researcher was responsible for conducting the interviews with the participants. The interviews took place on a single day at three school sites, and included the principal, EC case manager, EC inclusion teacher, and regular education inclusion teacher. I also interviewed the district EC director and an EC consultant working at several of the sites. The principals had designated someone at each site who would be the "point person" for me. The point person designed the interview schedule, fetched each participant when it was their scheduled time, and reserved a location for me to use to conduct each interview. Each interview lasted from approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The interviews were audio taped so that important points referred to by the participants would not be missed. In order to secure compatible responses each participant was asked the same set of questions. I transcribed all of the

interviews and each participant was delivered a copy of their interview transcript

through the school system's interoffice school mail delivery system so they could

check their interview transcript for accuracy and clarity.  Participants were given

a period of time to make any changes or additions to their transcripts.  None of

the participants made any changes to their interview transcripts.

## Data Analysis

I began the data analysis after finishing the first interview and ensured that

this was a continual process while I was working on the research.  This allowed

for progress focus on my interviews and observations and helped me to decide

how to test my emerging conclusions (Maxwell, 1998, p. 89).  I was mindful to

look for and analyze discrepant data and negative cases as I realized this was an

important way of testing proposal conclusion.  According to Maxwell (1998),

> There is a strong and often unconscious tendency for researchers to
> notice supporting instances and ignore ones that don't fit their pre-
> established conclusions.  Thus you need to develop explicit and
> systematic strategies for making sure you don't overlook data that could
> point out flaws in your reasoning or conclusions…you need to examine
> supporting and discrepant evidence to determine whether the conclusion
> in question is more plausible than the potential alternatives (p. 93).

Once the data was collected it was possible to identify what the data

yielded, how the data techniques connected, and ultimately what patterns and

themes emerged.  I transcribed all the interviews, and then the transcripts were

color-coded using validated coding methods.  Responses to the open-ended

questions were analyzed using qualitative, validated coding procedures as this

ensures accuracy in reporting results, themes, and emerging patterns in the data. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Responses offered by participants were also analyzed to identify whether any concerns were expressed more by some participants than others.

Data were then coded and classified depending on the perceived role of the principal in implementing an inclusion program. The coded data were analyzed by comparing the perceptions of support needed or provided across the various interview participants. Answers from participants were compared in the search for similarities and differences in the perceived and actual principal roles and support needed. I assessed the methods that schools had used for inclusion training purposes or lack thereof. I evaluated whether teachers are responsive to the support and training offered by their principal and if they were successful in helping to implement an inclusion program.

As a result, I was able to identify certain characteristics and similarities and differences in the participants' responses. It was also possible to determine specific theories concerning the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusion programs. Responses to the interview questions were reported in a narrative form. A comparison was also made between the research data and the literature on the principal's role in the implementation of an inclusion program.

Three different data sources were triangulated. Taped interviews, field notes, and inclusion classroom observations were compared to note any commonalities and differences of perceived and actual roles of principals

implementing inclusion programs.  Glesne (2011) states that "triangulation is the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources, multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives" (p. 47).  Glesne (2011) also discusses that triangulation is important because "it is always possible for a researcher to make mistakes in your interpretation and a different view on the situation can illuminate limitations or suggest which of competing versions is more likely and when what people say is inconsistent with what people do" (p. 47).  Creswell (1998) asserts that through triangulation, researchers make use of various multiple and miscellaneous sources, methods, investigators, and theories in an attempt to offer substantiating evidence of data.  He contends that "typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 202).  Through informal and formal observations, and interviews, I consider that I gained access to a wide range of data that was accordingly used as reliable and valid.  By using the process of triangulation as advocated by Maxwell (1998), I was able to compare and contrast data, themes and commonalities.  The use of triangulation was multi-purpose in that it was also used to strengthen validity and reliability.

Member checks were carried out in collaboration with the participants. Each participant was delivered a copy of their interview transcript through the school system's interoffice school mail delivery system so they could check their interview transcript for clarity and conciseness.  Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that member checks are "the most critical technique for establishing credibility"

(p. 314).  Creswell (1998) supports this approach as he states that it "involves

taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so

that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 203).

Similarly, Stake (1995) believes that participants should "play a major role

directing as well as acting in case study" research.  He contends that participants

should be provided with initial drafts of the research and given opportunities to

offer "alternative language, critical observations or interpretations" (p. 115).

Creswell (1998, p. 203) states that, *"Rich, thick description* allows the

reader to make decisions regarding transferability," as the researcher offers a

thorough description of the participants and the setting of the study.  This

enables the audience to transfer data to other settings and allows the audience

to make a decision as to whether these data and findings can be transferred

"because of shared characteristics" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32).  For this study

transferability was also established.  A thorough description of the participants'

perceptions of the role of the principal in implementing an inclusion program was

offered during the interview process of the participants and through a thorough

review of the literature.  Effectively, this will offer a foundation for others

interested in the principal's role in the implementation of an inclusion program

that may wish to utilize these findings as a basis for future research.

This study employed the concept of external audits as advocated by

(Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) which

fundamentally ensures dependability and confirmability.  In this process the

auditor assesses the dependability of the study, as well as analyzes the product, the data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions.  In addition, the auditor is also able to establish whether the study is supported by data and is essentially congruous.  The external audit process was initially established at my comprehensive examination defense, the proposal defense and continued through an ongoing close relationship between myself as the researcher, my committee chair and my other committee members.

## Summary

Chapter III presented the research questions, research design, instrumentation, data collection techniques, a description of the school settings, and data analysis procedures.  The data were analyzed to determine the perceptions and actualities of the principal's role in implementing an inclusion program.  Techniques for developing and reviewing the trustworthiness of the interview instruments were also explained.  There were sixteen participants selected for this qualitative case study.  Chapter IV will describe the demographic details of the participants.

**CHAPTER IV**

**PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Chapter III presented the research questions, research design, instrumentation, data collection techniques, a description of the school settings, and data analysis procedures. Chapter IV introduces the reader to the participants and offers some insight into their educational backgrounds, experience, and any other information pertinent to their experiences with special education.

Three principals, four exceptional children teachers, four regular education teachers, three exceptional children case managers, a central office exceptional children consultant and the central office exceptional children middle school program director were interviewed. These individuals come from various backgrounds, hold a variety of academic qualifications, and bring a diverse set of experiences to their school sites. The participants were selected for this study because of their willingness to be a part of implementing an inclusion program at their schools.

The responses from the participants offer a variety of perspectives that cut across gender, race, educational experiences, and multiple and competing intelligences. However, they provide the reader with valuable information as the participants reflect on their perceptions of inclusion. By way of introduction to the

participants, this section of the study examined the demographics of the school and characteristics of the participants to include their perceptions of how the inclusion program came about at their school and their personal feelings about inclusion.

## Bagley Middle School

Bagley Middle School is also located in a rural and suburban area on the outskirts of a more urban area.  Their approximate enrollment is 762 students in grades 6-8.  The average class size ranges from 18-20 students.  Approximately 14% of special education students enrolled in Bagley Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests.  There are 56 classroom teachers; 100% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified. Bagley Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 20%.  At the time this study was conducted, only a small number of special education classes were full inclusion, co-taught classes.  Bagley Middle School continued to have a resource class for each grade as well as one self-contained class.

The participants from Bagley Middle were:  Nora Holiday, a regular education teacher in a co-taught inclusion classroom; Henry King, the principal; Mary Johnson, the EC Case Manager; and Sasha Viton, a special education teacher in a co-taught inclusion classroom.

All participants agreed that the inclusion program came about at Bagley Middle as a result of a central office mandate.

In regards to participants' personal feelings about inclusion, there were differing beliefs and ways of thinking. For example, Mrs. Holiday's feelings about inclusion are that she disagrees with some of the aspects of inclusion because she hates to see children coming from a self-contained classroom into the regular classroom because they are so far behind. Also because moving them into a regular class means you have to change everything just to fit them and modify, modify, modify. Mr. King the principal, had similar feelings about inclusion. Mr. King's feelings about inclusion are that it's good for the kids. But not for every student because some of them because of their level don't need to be included in all classes and need to be resourced.

During my interview with Ms. Johnson the EC Case Manager, I noted that she seemed to have limited knowledge of program knowledge and policy despite her position as the exceptional children case manager. This could be attributed to this being her first year in this position or perhaps she was just nervous. Her attitude and affect were very flat, and I did not glean much enthusiasm from her in regards to the questions asked during our interview. It is of interest to note that Ms. Johnson stated to me that Bagley Middle had no self-contained classes but I was informed by another teacher that Bagley does indeed have one self-contained class that contains multiple grade levels of students.

Ms. Viton, a special education teacher seemed to be the only participant who believed solely in inclusion for students and not have supplemental resource or self-contained classes for service delivery. Ms. Viton is an advocate for

inclusion. She feels that with inclusion students get the social skills they need and they get continuity. Ms. Viton also feels that resource or self-contained students need to be included because even though they are on the lower level and struggle, teachers work together to help bridge that gap.

## Hawk Middle School

Hawk Middle School is also located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 759 students in grades 6-8. The average class size ranges from 23-25 students. Approximately 25% of special education students enrolled in Hawk Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math End-of-Grade tests. There are 51 classroom teachers; 95% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified. Hawk Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 8%. At the time this study was conducted, all special education service delivery was utilized in a co-taught inclusion classroom. There was no resource or self-contained special education classes on their campus.

The participants from Hawk Middle were: John Joyner, a regular education teacher in a co-taught inclusion classroom; Darla Rivers, the principal; Lorraine Deal, the EC Case Manager; and Evie Black, a special education teacher in a co-taught inclusion classroom.

All participants at Hawk Middle also agreed that inclusion came about due to a central office mandate. The participants' personal feelings toward inclusion were a mixed bag of thoughts. Mrs. Black, the special education inclusion co-teacher has mixed feelings about inclusion. She doesn't necessarily think all the

kids that are in there should be in there all day long (the regular classroom). Mrs. Black prefers that in addition to inclusion resource should be used. Mr. Joyner, the regular education inclusion co-teacher has similar feelings to that of Mrs. Black. Mr. Joyner's feelings about inclusion are that it works for about 90% of the kids but the classrooms need to be smaller; 28 in one class is too many. He feels that a mixture of programs is better for kids. By mixture he means inclusion, resource and self-contained.

Mrs. Deal, the EC Case manager has positive feelings toward inclusion. She said they have seen a great difference with student behaviors (behavior gets better) because the expectations are different in the regular classroom as opposed to the exceptional children classroom. Mrs. Deal also feels that inclusion helps the in-between kids to show more growth by pushing them in the regular classroom. Mrs. Rivers, the principal believes that in the majority of cases it's the best thing to do for the student in terms of raising their achievement and also helping their self-esteem. She also feels that inclusion also helps with the regular education kids by introducing them to more students and letting them know that everybody has some sort of talent.

**Salem Middle School**

Salem Middle School is located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 1,138 students in grades 6-8. The average class size ranges from 24-28 students. Approximately 29% of special education students enrolled in Salem Middle School were proficient on both their reading and math

End-of-Grade tests.    There are 66 classroom teachers; 97% are fully licensed and 96% are highly qualified.  Salem Middle School has an approximate teacher turnover rate of 7%.  At the time this study was conducted, all special education service delivery was utilized in a co-taught inclusion classroom.  There was no resource or self-contained special education classes on their campus.

The participants from Hawk Middle were:  Susie Joplin and Vivian Stein, regular education teachers in co-taught inclusion classrooms; Nora Starling, the principal; Mavis Gravel, the EC Case Manager; and Harry Castro and Sherry Davis, special education teachers in co-taught inclusion classrooms.

Just as at Bagley Middle and Hawk Middle, the participants at Salem Middle agreed that inclusion came about as the result of a central office mandate.

Regarding the participants' personal feelings about inclusion, there were differing thoughts from participants in various departments.  The two special education inclusion teachers and one of the regular education teachers agreed on having more options for students with special needs than just inclusion.  Mr. Castro feels that the lower functioning children need more than inclusion like a self-contained class so they can get some life skills training.  Ms. Davis also feels that inclusion should not be the only service delivery for students.  She feels that some lower students benefit from a small group but perhaps not for the entire day.  Mrs. Stein commented on the emotional issues of some students as being a factor for her position on inclusion.  She feels that some students would benefit

from a smaller classroom such as resource or self-contained based on their level of emotional functioning and that they may not thrive in a large classroom with 30-plus students despite having at least two teachers in the class.

Ms. Gravel, the EC Case Manager, Ms. Joplin, a regular education inclusion co-teacher, and Mrs. Starling, the principal are of the same belief about inclusion. Ms. Gravel said that she agrees with the inclusion model. She thinks that kids learn from each other as well as the teacher and that it's an experience the kids need to have because life is not self contained. Life is not going to be modified for most people. Mrs. Starling, the principal initially did not think inclusion was a good idea. However, after having inclusion as the only service delivery for her students, she says that has been what has made a believer out of her. Only three of her students did not benefit from inclusion but she feels with more collaboration and support, all her students will benefit from inclusion.

### Central Office/Consultants

Rebecca Albright is the district exceptional children program director for the middle school division. In this capacity, Mrs. Albright supervises all exceptional children programs.

Mrs. Albright was then asked what her feelings are about inclusion. She stated that:

> Well I'm a great promoter of inclusion because my background is in special education. I don't like the isolation that has separated exceptional children from general education. Now since they are being held to the same standard as general education is even more reason they have to be

included in the regular classroom and we have to think about the least restrictive environment.

Jane Smith is the central office consultant for inclusion and co-teaching. She conducts teacher trainings at schools, and meets with principals on a regular basis. She is a Caucasian female.

Ms. Smith was also asked what are her personal feelings about inclusion. She stated that:

> I think the least restrictive environment for the largest majority of children in special education can grow and just blossom in a co-teaching classroom. Now there are children that have significant needs that a co-teaching classroom is not appropriate for them. They need other additional supports. But I think the largest majority of children especially if they began in that least restrictive environment in elementary school and it just wraps around into middle school and then wraps and of course to the high school. I think the kids self esteem grows in a co-teaching classroom and I think again they have access to the regular curriculum at the regular pace with all the strategies that the children without disabilities are provided Also those knowing there are some youngsters in some schools with significant needs that that is not the appropriate setting for them. Or they may have a co-teaching math classroom that they are able to really work through and handle successfully but they need a smaller setting for reading and writing. I just think the kids are blossoming.

The majority of participants do believe in the benefits of an inclusion program while some do still hold on to the belief that resource classes and self-contained classes are what's best for students with special needs.

The central purpose of this case study was to determine how principal's knowledge of special education law and policy directly affects how they implement special education inclusion programs. Is their knowledge sufficient to

be able to implement sound programs that adhere to the law and support students' specific needs.  More specifically, this chapter will focus on the data analysis and findings of the study that relate to the principal's role in the implementation of special education inclusion programs and will be presented as a thorough discussion of the perceived and actual role of the principal when implementing an inclusion program.

This chapter presents the participants, data and findings as they relate to the three research questions in narrative form.  It is intended to present the perceptions of each of the participants in terms of their experiences with implementing an inclusion program during this school year and demonstrate the ways in which they have dealt with the various situations they have encountered. No study of implementing programs for special education students can fail to appreciate the crucial role that the principal plays in the success of those programs.  The support that teachers receive from the principal plays a fundamental role in teacher buy-in to the program which directly affects the success of the program.

Using these concerns as a foundation, this study used interviews, observations, and field-notes to assess the perceived role of the principal in implementing inclusion programs.  The data provided are extraordinary, and it will be seen that the participants' testimonies of their perceptions are detailed, remarkable and of the utmost value.  The evidence presented offers a different and unusual perspective than that which is found in secondary sources.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the themes that arose from the data using three research questions.  The first research question, Facilitating the Change to Inclusive Culture had three themes:  (a) school culture, (b) process that influenced culture, and (c) collaboration.  These themes investigated how a school culture will or will not change as a result of implementing an inclusive culture, what the processes or steps were (or not) that principals used to facilitate the change to inclusive culture, and the importance of collaboration when implementing an inclusive culture.

The second research question, Principal's Preparation and Professional Development had three themes:  (a) participating in professional development, (b) facilitating professional development, and (c) getting teachers to work together.  These themes investigated what type, if any professional development did principals participate in when implementing an inclusion program, did the principal facilitate any of the professional development that took place for their teachers, and how principals' involvement was perceived in implement an inclusion program.

The third research question, Principal's Knowledge, Vision, and Decision Making had three themes:  (a) working knowledge, (b) sources of knowledge, and (c) hands on/hands off.  These themes investigated the perceptions of teachers and staff of their principal's knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice, how principals get knowledge of special education law, policy, and

practice, and the perceptions of teachers and staff on whether their principal takes a hands on or a hands off approach to special education leadership.

## Facilitating the Change to Inclusive Culture

The reauthorization of IDEA was the catalyst for schools and districts to re-evaluate their practices in regards to service delivery for their special education students.  Up to this point, a variety of self-contained and pullout resource programs still existed across and within divisions.  That being said, making the change to a full inclusion program utilizing co-teaching was a big and daunting step for some.  Therefore collaboration, staff development, and school culture came to the forefront as areas that needed to be addressed before transitioning to inclusion.

When I asked, "Do you feel the school culture is better or worse because of inclusion?" there were varied answers across school sites as well as within schools.  This question was to gauge the participants' perceptions of whether or not school culture was changed as a result of implementing an inclusive culture. School culture is an important component of implementing effective inclusion programs within a school.  School culture includes perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of those working with inclusion and those who don't work directly with included students.

Bagley Middle only had a handful of full inclusion, co-taught classes for their students with disabilities.  Bagley Middle continued to have a resource class for each grade as well as one self-contained exceptional children class.

Mr. King, the principal stated that it's (school culture) not worse. Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager stated that she feels the culture is better and that there is a good relationship with the teachers making plans together. Ms. Viton, an EC teacher said, "I think it's (school culture) better. The kids now have a higher self-esteem because they don't feel singled out. They don't feel like they're different and it makes them feel better about themselves."

The perception at Bagley Middle is that there is an agreement between the principal and teachers that the school culture is better because teachers' relationships are better, teachers are planning together, and inclusion has impacted students' self-esteem in a positive way. Teachers having the opportunities to plan together was found to be one of the most important pieces of implementing effective inclusion programs by participants. Better working relationships impacts school culture in a positive way by first having those opportunities to plan together. The increased self-esteem of students directly impacts school culture in a positive way also.

Hawk Middle is located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 759. All service delivery for students with disabilities at Hawk Middle is co-taught inclusion classes.

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children's teacher and the principal Mrs. Rivers said that the culture is better at Hawk Middle as a result of inclusion. Mrs. Black feels that the reason the culture is better is similar to that of Ms. Viton from Bagley Middle in that, "I do see that for many students it's very positive. They

are with their peers and I think it puts them in a situation where they want to do better and they want to be like their peers." Mrs. Rivers also has a comment regarding the benefits for students: "Our EC students meet regular students and they are much more tolerant and accepting because these are in life these are kids and adults in that they need to understand disabilities all students too."

Mrs. Deal, the EC case manager has somewhat of a conflicting opinion about whether school culture is better or worse. She goes on to say, "I think a little bit of both. I think the culture is better and I think our EC teachers especially our assistants feel better like they are more part of a team. I would say sometimes the culture is negative because it gets overwhelming at times for the staff and they get frustrated with all the changes."

The perception at Hawk Middle overall is that the culture is better because of inclusion because it benefits the students. The only dissention albeit a small one, is that inclusion may have a negative effect on school culture because making the change has been overwhelming and frustrating for some. This dissention is something to be concerned with since school culture affects what staff focus on and what they think is important. If improving school culture is viewed as just another thing we have on our plate, then true school improvement won't be authentic.

Salem Middle is located in a rural and suburban area. Their approximate enrollment is 1,138 students. All service delivery for students with disabilities at Salem Middle is co-taught inclusion classes.

At Salem Middle, there were contrasting perceptions about whether school culture was better or worse resulting from implementing inclusion. Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher in a co-taught classroom said, "I don't think there's any real difference (in the culture of the school)." Ms. Gravel, the EC case manager feels that it improved the school culture for the students, but may have negatively impacted teachers' perceptions of school culture. She says that the negativity comes from teachers being resentful of their perceptions of being "forced" to do inclusion. From the student standpoint, their school culture has improved because they feel more normal not being in that small class with the same kids.

Mrs. Starling, the principal feels that the school culture is better. She responded from reflecting on how inclusion impacted the teachers. Mrs. Starling feels that inclusion has improved the relationships and perceptions of special education teachers versus regular education teachers. She feels that now teachers are just seen as teachers and not a "special" teacher or "those" teachers. Both regular education and special education teachers have begun to trust each other and find strength in working together.

The contrasting perceptions at Salem Middle made this researcher consider where the interviewees were coming from when they responded to the question about school culture. It is interesting to note that the teachers responded from the student perspective while the principal responded from the teacher perspective and did not include any comments regarding students. The

improved relationships between teachers impacted their perceptions of how the school culture was improved.

The exceptional children consultant, Ms. Smith stated that overall school culture is enhanced by the inclusion model. She states that, "I think the kids no matter what level feels so much better about themselves and I have seen their self esteem and their success academic success just take off."

Making the change to full inclusion in a co-teaching setting was going to be a new way of thinking and teaching for some if not all of the people involved. Therefore the participants' perceptions of the process that influenced culture had to be investigated. It was found to be important by this researcher to ask the question, "What actions were done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices" in order to determine if all stakeholders were on the same page. An underlying aspect of this question was whether or not principals had collaborated with their staff on the entire process from inception to implementation or did principals just say, "This is what we're going to do, make it work". A sampling of responses will be given by school site in order to get a sense of the thought process of these three principals when implementing an inclusion program.

When asked what actions were done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices, the principal Mr. King did not really give me an answer. Instead, it was an exceptional children teacher, Ms. Viton that gave me a specific answer. She stated that, "The teachers were trained; regular education and inclusion teachers together to get that co-teaching experience."

Ms. Viton was the only interviewee at Bagley Middle who was able to say specifically what was done.  Basically that all teachers involved, regular education and special education teachers were trained how to have co-taught classrooms.  This lack of response from other participants gives me pause.  It is very disconcerting that a school would make such a huge change transitioning to inclusion without first getting some background or philosophical knowledge of what would be involved in the process and what they (staff) could expect to happen in regards to training, classrooms, etc.

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children teacher stated that the principal included teachers in setting up student's schedules.  She also said that Mrs. Rivers, the principal listens to them and works with them as a team.  "Mrs. Rivers is not there hovering over you but working side by side with you."

Mr. Joyner, a regular education teacher said that the principal basically said, "OK here's what we're going to do."  He stated that teachers went through the training but the principal gave them (the teachers) the freedom to just work it out.

Again, here we see disconnect between departments.  The special education teacher stated that the principal worked with them to facilitate the change to inclusion but the regular education teacher said the opposite.  It is the perception of this researcher that a common thread in facilitating the change to inclusion was that teachers (both regular and special education) were the catalysts to planning and implementing the change.

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When asked what actions were done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices, Mrs. Starling, the principal at Salem Middle said:

> The first thing we did was actually talk to the exceptional children teacher and the EC case manager. We brought in the supervisor from central office and just tried to gather information to find out exactly what was that particular kind of program. You know why was it being mandated, what were the perceived benefits for our children, how would we schedule this, which teachers would we get, how many teachers would we get. And we also talked about what kind of plan we needed for staff development not only for our exceptional children teachers but for the regular education teachers using an inclusion model.

Ms. Gravel, the EC case manager referenced in the above quote from the principal had a contrasting perception of what actions were taken to make the change to inclusion. She stated that:

> It was just changed. It was like one day there was no more self contained. I think it was a situation or a decision that was made in what was thought to be the best interest of the school. I think a little bit more of a transition would have been nice for the teacher's sake. I don't think that was as disruptive for the students as it was for the teachers. Some of whom had never taught in a regular education classroom, they had always been self contained. And then to all of a sudden have to work with different types of teachers and students, I think it was more of a shock to them.

The perception of this researcher in regards to what was done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices is that of, "this is what we're doing so make it work". Both Hawk Middle and Salem Middle had similar answers to that question. What is evident to this researcher is that the principal and the participants had contrasting perceptions of their particular roles in transitioning to inclusion.

Mrs. Albright, the district exceptional children director said that, "Well first of all we had to plan for training. We have to train everybody who participates in that co-teaching situation. So training is prime."

Fostering collaboration is important when making major changes within a program, process, or policy. Some teachers who were expected to become inclusion teachers (regular education and special education) had never had the experience of being a co-teacher much less in the case of regular education teachers having special education students in their classroom. Fostering collaboration between teachers and administrators is crucial to implementing inclusion. When asked, "Is fostering collaboration between teachers and administration seen to be important with regards to implementing inclusionary practices?" the responses varied within schools. At times I wondered if some participants even worked together in the same school knowing that they did. Collaboration can be perceived as situational or when necessary in some cases.

Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager and Ms. Viton an exceptional children teacher both agree that collaboration is key when implementing inclusionary practices. Ms. Johnson says, "You have to plan together. You have to create a positive relationship in the best interest of the child to make inclusion work." Ms. Viton stated that, "Collaboration is a must. You can't have inclusion without collaboration."

As with Bagley Middle, Mr. Joyner, a regular education teacher and Mrs. Rivers, the principal agree that collaboration is an important part of making

inclusion work.  Mr. Joyner says that, "We are meeting all the time because as a team every day we're talking about what are you doing and how do I align my classroom."  Mrs. Rivers stated, "It's really opened up a lot of conversation with administrators, regular education and exceptional children teachers."

Once again, there are contrasting perceptions at Salem Middle between the principal and teachers.  Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher says that, "I think administration has a more hands-off approach here.  I think it's more teachers working together and working with the exceptional children specialists."  Mrs. Davis, an exceptional children teacher is new to inclusion and has been a self-contained teacher for several years.  In regards to fostering collaboration being important she stated, "No, it's not important.  It's been pretty much a reign on the process to make sure you look good when people come in.  They (administration) really don't have a lot to do with us."

Mrs. Starling, the principal had something a bit different to say about her involvement in collaboration.  She stated that:

> They (the teachers) have to (collaborate). They have to collaborate and plan it not it falls apart and it fosters more discipline problems with their structure.  The plan where everybody has input on how to work with the children you know breaking them up or direct instruction or use the computer.  So I definitely have seen more of that.

This question was asked in a different way to Mrs. Albright, the district exceptional children program director for the middle school division.  In regards to the importance of fostering collaboration, I asked Mrs. Albright:  "How do you

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view the relationship between the regular education teachers, the exceptional

children teachers and the administrators?" Her response was very descriptive

and she used a wonderful analogy to describe said relationships. Mrs. Albright

stated that:

> That's (collaboration) very challenging mainly because of when you have the general education and the special education together you've got to have some type of administrative input and I always when I'm training I'd talk about the fact that it's like a marriage and when two people don't always get along sometimes you have to see a counselor. And I look at the building administrator as being the counselor. And that's the person you go to when things aren't working well relationship wise because it affects kids all and they see straight through that. But the challenging part of that is that the EC teachers are being seen more as assistants coming in instead of co owning that entire class. And so that's got come from administration to say this is co ownership you know this is a marriage, act as a team. Those students should not know who is who. That support has got to come from that administrator.

One thing all participants at all schools agreed on is that collaboration,

common planning, working together, etc. is the most important factor in being

able to implement effective inclusion programs.

Facilitating the change to inclusive culture is what this researcher

perceives to be the most important but challenging component of implementing

inclusion programs. Within schools, interviewees had contrasting points about

whether school culture was better or worse because of inclusion. Also, there

was contrasting points about the actual process of making the change to

inclusion. Some interviewees said that their principal simply said, "We're doing it,

make it work" and some principals said much time and planning went into the

process.  One point they all agree on is the importance of collaboration in the process in both the initial implementation and the monitoring component.

In a co-teaching inclusion program, collaboration has to be utilized.  Co-teaching requires a culture of working together both within the classroom and during those planning times and that was something that everyone agreed on.  Co-teaching takes training, practice, observation, and teamwork.  One simply cannot just walk in and be an effective co-teacher.  Even after various training and staff development on how to be a co-teacher, teachers still need to continue to support each other and continue the training piece to be able to meet the needs of their students.

### Principal's Preparation and Professional Development

A school cannot just simply "do" inclusion.  Planning, preparation, and professional development are important parts of a school's transition to implementing inclusion.  A principal's perception of special education influences how s/he go about making the change to inclusion or co-teaching.

Through this case study, it is evident that professional development means different things to different people even in the same building.  Some view professional development as an outside trainer or specialist is required for something to be deemed professional development while others view it as a process to "train" each other.

This part of the data analysis will dissect perceptions on the level of participation in preparatory professional development and the importance of the role of the principal in transitioning to inclusion.

Participating in professional development is an important part of being able to implement effective inclusion programs; not just the classroom teachers, but leadership as well. The first series of interview questions to be discussed is: "What types of professional development have you participated in with regard to implementing inclusionary practices?"

Mrs. Holiday, a regular education teacher who came to NC from another state said that, "I have in Georgia but not here."

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children teacher at Hawk Middle said that at her district meetings they talk about inclusionary practices and she's gone to another middle school to watch some of their strategies were the only professional development she's received. Mrs. Deal, the EC case manager stated that in regards to the professional development she participated in:

> Rebecca Albright came to talk about inclusion. We have been working with Jane Smith who works with our teachers. She comes in and schedules mini workshops with their groups and comes in once a month to do observations and gives us feedback you know I think could go better, I think this went well. She will meet with the co - teaching pairs and then she will meet with the group and she pops in. We have done some in house type stuff just you know talking about simple modifications.

Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher said that the teachers had professional development regarding the types of inclusion models and that she

had taken it upon herself to attend a reading workshop that was for exceptional children teachers.  She felt this was important for her since she had not taught in a co-teaching classroom before.  She stated, "I thought it would be really, really important to have an idea of how kids learn to read especially those kids to have a lot of trouble learning to read.  It gave me a better idea of how to present the material without focusing so much on just the written word."  Mrs. Stein also stated that the principal just basically planned who would come when.

Ms. Gravel, the EC case manager said, "We've had ongoing workshops with Jane Smith and it was called inclusion strategies but it was really more co-teaching and inclusion.  And then we've had some through the county from Rebecca Albright who is our program coordinator".

It is important to note that none of the participants expressed that their principal had attended any of the initial staff development on implementing inclusion.  This researcher is not stating that the principal has to be a main participant or even facilitate the staff development.  However, it is the belief of this researcher that the principal should at least be in attendance during training on inclusion.

Ms. Smith, the exceptional children consultant said this when asked about the professional development piece:

> Rebecca Albright did an overview of co-teaching in a couple of short sessions.  But when I came in we just started with the models and what the models looked like, why is co-teaching effective for the children how can it be, what are the successes what are the challenges to do this, what

does the scheduling look like?  A lot of emphasis on what did the models look like and how can you do this.

Based on the information gathered by participants, the professional development opportunities for teachers implementing co-teaching and inclusion were conducted by the district exceptional children director and the exceptional children consultant.  The school principals were not involved in the process.

Whether or not the principal facilitated any of the staff development on inclusion was an important part of this process.  This second section of Principal's Preparation and Professional development looks at how principals answered the question, "Have you facilitated the professional development?"

All three principals, Mr. King of Bagley Middle, Mrs. Rivers of Hawk Middle, and Mrs. Starling of Salem Middle answered that they had not facilitated any of the professional development for implementing inclusion.  Mrs. Starling went on to say that, "We have the outside consultant so I don't have to do it (facilitate professional development) myself."

This study is focused on the principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program.  With no set process or procedure in place, transitioning and implementing an inclusion program is left to chance.  Getting teachers to work together is an important part of the process of implementing inclusion programs.  Therefore I am interested in people's perceptions of how important the principal's role is in managing the change to inclusion and what is the most important factor attributed to the success of the implementation of

inclusive practices in schools.  These two ideas gave me pause to think about:

Are principals viewed as instructional leaders?  Do they view themselves as an

important and integral part of the inclusion implementation?  Do all stakeholders

(teachers/administrators) believe themselves to be integral to the success of an

inclusion program?  Most important, based on perceptions is everyone on the

same page as to what is the most important factor in the implementation of

inclusive practices?

Mrs. Holiday, a regular education teacher and Mr. King, the principal state

that being able to plan together is the number one factor to attribute to the

success of implementing inclusion at her school, and training is the second.  Mr.

King also states in regards to the importance of his role in managing the change

to inclusion, "I had to make sure that people knew I was committed because if

they don't think the administrators are committed to it they will never commit to

it."

Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager attributes the support of leadership

the important factor in implementing inclusion.

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children teacher at Hawk Middle said the role

of the principal is very important since she is ultimately responsible for meeting

the needs of children.

Mrs. Rivers, the principal said that her role and the most important factor

in the success of their inclusion program is,

I think it was important that the staff has to know that I believe that this is the right thing to do. And that you're not just doing this because somebody downtown thought it would be a good idea. You know I think that you have to walk the talk to truly believe it and it's not something that we can fake so I think that part is important.

Mrs. Deal, the EC case manager at Hawk Middle said that the exceptional children teachers are the most important factor in successfully implementing an inclusion program. She says that the exceptional children teachers have worked their way into the regular classrooms without being intrusive. Those teachers have really tried to make a smooth transition.

Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher at Salem Middle stated when asked how important was the principal's role in managing the change to inclusion stated, "To be honest I don't think in this particular school aside from saying 'this is what we're going to do' she has been hands-off with it. She designated people to do that." Ms. Gravel, the EC case manager said that the principal's role was very important because "we did what she told us to do and she told us to have a full inclusion setting and so that's what we've done."

Mrs. Starling, the principal at Salem Middle said that it was important that the staff had to believe that I was on board (with implementing inclusion).

Ms. Smith, the exceptional children consultant stated that planning was the centerpiece of an effective co-teaching classroom. Also that collaborative planning between regular education and special education teachers is crucial to being able to have quality inclusion programs. Ms. Smith goes on to say that, "Regular education is the expert on content, special education is the expert on

accommodations, modifications, and strategies that would fit the learning styles of the children in this blended classroom."

Mrs. Albright, the district exceptional children director says that the principal's role is vital, and that if you don't have that kind of support (from the principal) then that kind of program will not work. She says specifically, "It's that administrator piece that makes a difference with effective inclusion."

The common thread here is planning, collaboration, and working together. The most important factor in successfully implementing inclusionary practices is the opportunity for regular education and special education teachers being able to collaborate and plan together. The role of the principal in this process is perceived to be one of support rather than participation. The principal is responsible for making those opportunities available for teachers to be able to work together, plan together, and support each other.

## Principal's Knowledge, Vision, and Decision-Making

Initially, implementing a new program or process falls mainly on the principal. However, in some cases we see a hands-off approach or pass the buck. This can be due to different factors. A principal may not have the knowledge about exceptional children programs or policy to implement an inclusion program. A principal may feel that they have hired staff that are experts in their field and thus given the task to develop an inclusion program. The principal should understand the needs of exceptional students and should demonstrate knowledge of inclusion instructional practices.

A principal should also have a vision as to what their inclusion program should be and communicate that to their stakeholders.  Principals should be able to use their knowledge of special education process and policy in order to make meaningful decisions regarding what will best meet the needs of their students.

An important point to keep in mind here is if the principal utilizes or is perceived to utilize a hands-off or hands-on approach to their involvement in special education.  Is their role effective?  Are there mitigating factors that lead a principal one way or the other?

The participant interview questions that were used in this section of the data analysis and findings are:  a) How did the principal (you) share his/her (your) vision on inclusion?  b) What do you perceive the principal's (your) knowledge of special education procedure and policy to be?  and c) How would you describe your principal's (your) level of involvement in meeting the needs of special education students?  I will address the responses to the vision question first.

It is impossible to know for certain if any of these issues factor in to how a principal develops or implements an inclusion program.  All three principals have been forthcoming, but I can't say that they have answered my interview questions with fidelity.

The working knowledge of special education law, policy, and programming of the principal is the key component in this discussion.  In this section,

participants are addressing the question, "How did the principal (you) share his/her (your) vision on inclusion?"

Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager said that Mr. King, the principal shared his vision of inclusion with her during her employment interview, and Ms. Viton an exceptional children teacher stated that Mr. King "said that he wanted us to do inclusion and of course he doesn't have an EC background so didn't really know how or when or any of that stuff."

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children teacher and Mrs. Deal, the EC case manager said that Mrs. Rivers, the principal shared her vision on inclusion by simply sitting down and talking with them and that she (Mrs. Rivers) depended on them to help her with setting up the inclusion program. It was more a collaborative planning approach.

Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher and Mrs. Davis, an exceptional children teacher said that the principal shared her vision on inclusion this way, "She called us into her office and told us we were going to be the inclusion team. She basically told us we had minimal choices as to how to get it to work because the end result was that we had to get it to work and that we're going to be the model school so we'd better get it done."

Mrs. Starling, the principal said that her vision was more of a mandate and not really a vision initially. She stated that, "The vision was probably not as positive but it was one of urgency that we were going to have to do it and we want to do the best we can with it in survival mode."

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With most given issues, tasks, problems, perception is reality. But is it necessary for principals to have an abundance of special education knowledge in order to be able to implement an inclusion program? Must they demonstrate a working knowledge of special education in order for teachers and staff to "buy in" to making the transition to inclusion? Many principals have not had any school law or special education law classes and/or training in many years and are ill-prepared to address issues in relation to special education. The bottom line, is principal's knowledge of special education sufficient to be able to implement sound programs that adhere to the law and support student's specific needs? The sources of knowledge that a principal has is the main component of this discussion. This question, "What do you perceive the principal's (your) knowledge of special education procedure and policy to be?" will be addressed in this part of the data analysis and findings.

Mrs. Holiday, a regular education teacher and Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager stated that Mr. King really understands special education and that he does have knowledge of special education procedures. Ms. Johnson also says, "That he listens; he listens and asks a lot of questions. He knows who to call in case he's not sure of something."

Ms. Viton, an exceptional children teacher also feels that Mr. King has knowledge of special education policy and procedure. She says, "I definitely think he's done his homework. He doesn't have an EC background but he knows what's going on. And if he doesn't or he has a question he comes straight to us."

Mrs. Black, an exceptional children teacher feels because Mrs. Rivers, the principal has a son who is learning disabled that she has experience and understands and knows about special education.  Her own experience supports her goal of helping students succeed.

The principal, Mrs. Rivers said that her level of knowledge is not as high as she would like it to be.  She does say that she definitely understands the paperwork procedures and can read and understand and IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

Mrs. Stein, a regular education teacher said that her principal, Mrs. Starling doesn't understand exceptional children education.  Also that she doesn't understand AIG (Academically Intellectually Gifted) education either. Mrs. Davis, an exceptional children teacher concurs.  She stated, "I think her knowledge is very limited and she depends highly on the case manager."

Mrs. Starling, the principal said that she relies heavily on her "experts" and the training and intuition of her staff in regards to special education knowledge.

In regards to this issue, the question at hand needed to be changed up a bit to glean an appropriate response from Mrs. Albright.  I asked, "Do you feel that your building level principals know enough about special education to implement an inclusion program?"  Mrs. Albright responded:

> Well you only have one or two that are on the same level.  They are on varying levels of knowledge of EC.  I think most of them have worked with it long enough that they know that if I come in and they have questions they know exactly what to ask me to help them.  So I think with a lot of discussion and training and informal talking I think they're getting it.

Hands-on vs. hands-off…that is the question.

The commonality here is that all principals did seem to be honest about their lack of knowledge or that they felt they had room to grow in the area of sources of knowledge. Their reliance on their special education staff was evident in developing and implementing inclusion classes.

Having different viewpoints and perceptions on the previous section regarding the principal's knowledge of special education, I felt it was important to determine how stakeholders would describe the principal's level of involvement in meeting the needs of special education students. If they take a hands-off approach is it effective and do students still grow? Or are they ineffective in their use of a hands-on approach? Also, is the principal's perception of the use of a hands-on or hands-off approach the same as their staff. Do they agree or disagree on what their actual role is?

Mr. King, the principal would say his level of involvement in special education is four out of five. He feels it's all about learning the kids to understand the disability. He states that, "When you can understand the disability then you can work with the kids to assist them and their teachers and their parents."

Ms. Johnson, the EC case manager says Mr. King's level of involvement is wonderful; that he goes above and beyond to meet the needs of his students and that includes working with parents. Ms. Viton an exceptional children teacher said, "He's been pretty involved; he'll come to us and say 'well what do

you think is best'. And then we'll work out an approach together so he meets the needs of most students."

Mrs. Deal, the EC case manager said that Mrs. Rivers, her principal is pretty involved and this is probably because her own child is learning disabled so she knows the process.

Mrs. Rivers, the principal feels her level of involvement is more of scheduling and looking at who is best suited to teach exceptional students. Also the monitoring piece is a big part of being involved with exceptional children.

Mrs. Starling, the principal did not actually answer my question specifically. She talked about having periodic meetings and that an outside consultant was working with teachers but did not say what her level of involvement is. However she did state that, "My involvement has been pretty hands on in the last two years" but did not elaborate on what that entailed.

Mrs. Davis, an exceptional children teacher had this to say about the principal's level of involvement with special education:

> I think the special education students are not her number one priority. And I think she wants to make sure the law is followed to avoid legal issues but I don't think she wants to spend any more time dealing with them than she has to. She basically wants us to do our job and leave her out of it as much as possible.

Mrs. Albright said in regards to how she perceives her principals' level of involvement in special education is more of attending meetings. The principals seem to attend more meetings when they know Mrs. Albright will be coming.

She goes on to say that in her opinion, about 80% of the principals are involved with special education.

It is the belief of this researcher that two of the three principals take a hands-on approach and are very involved in the processes of their school's inclusion programs. Their honesty about not knowing as much as they should was a positive response; they were not trying to make themselves out to be something they're not.

## Summary

This chapter presented the participants, data analysis and findings of the study that relate to the perceived role of the principal in implementing inclusion programs in the areas of: facilitating the change to inclusive culture; principal's preparation and professional development; and principal's knowledge, vision, and decision-making. Data analysis and findings were used to inform the summary, conclusions and recommendations to understand and improve the principal's role in implementing an inclusion program and how to make it effective for all students. These recommendations and implications will be discussed in Chapter V.

# CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous chapter, the analysis and findings of the study were presented as a thorough discussion of the principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program. The central purpose of this case study was to determine how principal's knowledge of special education law and policy directly affects how they implement special education programs. Is their knowledge sufficient to be able to implement sound programs that adhere to the law and support students' specific needs? More specifically, the study focused on the following three research questions.

1. From a cultural, policy, and implementation perspective, how do principals support personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) who work together to develop and implement a special education inclusion program?
2. What are the factors in principal preparation and professional development programs that influence principals' perspectives and perceptions of special education?
3. How do principals establish a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are implementing inclusion programs?

The central themes of this study are first Facilitating the Change to Inclusive Culture.  Second, Principal's Preparation and Professional Development, and third, Principal's Knowledge, Vision, and Decision Making.

Chapter V offers concluding remarks in relation to this case study and suggestions and recommendations for improved practice and future research.

This case study used participant interviews to gain a greater understanding of the perceived role of the principal in implementing an inclusion program.  Supplementary information was acquired through observations and field notes.

The principal's responsibilities with regards to special education are:  to develop/continue programs that adhere to the law/policy; encourage communication and collaboration with special education staff; attend IEP meetings; keep current on what works; monitor/evaluate their school's current practices for process improvement.  Boscardin says that "administrators who promote knowledge-based decisions and evidenced-based instruction to solve educational problems will evoke better educational outcomes for students and improved instructional practices for teachers" (2005, p. 28).  More importantly, giving teachers opportunities for good quality professional development on how to be an effective inclusion co-teacher and what that looks like in the classroom is crucial to effective implementation of an inclusion program.  The principalship should include visionary leadership qualities, efficient operations management, high quality instructional leadership, and advocacy practices that address the

specific needs of students. These elements should be evident in services for students with disabilities, or more specifically, the inclusionary or co-teaching practices at the school.  Principals should be knowledgeable of special education law and policy as well as developing an environment that encourages and supports collegiality among staff members.

This change in philosophy to educating exceptional children in the regular classroom, inclusion, has resulted in a cultural change in many schools.  The principal is at the center of this cultural change and is the central agent responsible for transitioning schools to inclusion in the regular education classroom where special education students are provided the necessary supports in order to learn alongside their non-disabled peers.

Inclusion is defined as "the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, in their neighborhood school, in age-appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplemental aids-for both children and teachers" (Lipsky & Gartner, 1994, p. 763).  Yell (2012) states that "inclusion refers to a placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities" (p. 310).

There are two general principles as to why schools should implement inclusion programs for their special education students.  First, services in the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities are required by law-IDEA.  Second, inclusive practices give students with disabilities access to the

general curriculum.  The benefits of inclusion are many and the goal is to provide the special needs student with as many normal, inclusive experiences as their general education peers are afforded.

Frank Bowe (2005) in *Making Inclusion Work* states that with inclusion programs, students with disabilities remain in general classrooms all the time. Related services are provided with professionals entering the classroom and deliver assistance there.  Stainback and Stainback (1995) state that placement in the general classroom is a civil right.  They believe that schools should be restructured so that full inclusion can be provided for all students with special needs.

Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis said,

> Inclusive schools are places where students, regardless of ability, race, language and income, are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula and receive collaborative support to succeed. In inclusive schools, services and supports are brought directly to them (2008, p. 24).

The benefits of an inclusion program include:  it helps to facilitate a more appropriate social behavior of the special needs students because of the higher expectations of the students in the regular education classroom, it helps to promote levels of achievement that are higher, or at least as high as, those achieved in the self-contained classrooms, it offers social support because the special needs students are included with their non-disabled peers, and it improves the ability of all the students and teachers to adapt to different teaching

and learning styles and to more openly accept diversity (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000).

Inclusive education offers many benefits for both special education and regular education students. For special education students, instructional time with non-disabled peers helps the students to learn strategies taught by the teacher(s). Teachers bring in different ways to teach a lesson for special needs students and their non-disabled peers. In this way, all of the students in the classroom benefit from instructional practices. The students can now learn from the lesson how to help each other. Socialization in the school allows the students to learn communication skills and interaction skills from each other. Students being able to help each other gives them a better learning environment (Ainscow, 2003).

This study was conducted at three middle schools in a school system in the southeast. This school district was studied because the iddle school division had been "loosely mandated" to develop and implement full inclusion programs using a co-teaching approach. Three principals, four exceptional children teachers, four regular education teachers, three exceptional children case managers, a central office exceptional children consultant and the central office exceptional children middle school program director were interviewed.

Using the three research questions as a foundation, this study used a qualitative, case study research approach to reflect the perceptions that principals, teachers (both regular education and special education), and central

office support staff have on developing and implementing special education inclusion programs in their schools.

## Summary of Findings

The principal's role is crucial in order or inclusion to be successful, and the principal must exhibit behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Sage & Burrello, 1994). When principals pay attention to particular initiatives, there will be a greater degree of implementation in the classroom (Fullan, 1992). Principals are now expected to design, lead, manage and implement programs for all students, including those with disabilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Sage & Burrello, 1994). Elmore (2002) stated that in order for this to occur, principals need to form a unity where all members of the school community are working towards one task, one common vision, and that shared vision is student achievement. "Inclusion refers to a placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities" (Yell, 2012). Inclusionary environments have special education teachers working alongside general education teachers cooperatively to provide a program for all children in the classroom (Praisner, 2003). The most common practice is the use of a co-teaching method. According to Marilyn Friend, co-teaching may be defined as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with

disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs (Friend, 2008).

## Facilitating the Change to Inclusion

School culture, actions of the principal to facilitate the change to inclusion and fostering collaboration were the key components that influenced the principal's role in implementing an inclusion program. The success of students is dependent on how the principal understands implementing policy and practice. Principals must understand the process, how to support teachers, and how to work together for effective programs. The importance of school culture on implementing inclusion was addressed at both Bagley Middle and Hawk Middle. The administrators and teachers agreed that their school culture is better because of inclusion because of how it positively benefits their students, teachers' relationships are better, and teachers are planning together.

Even though making the change to inclusion was a central office mandate, all three principals shared a belief of the value of an inclusion program and that all of their students should be included in the regular classroom. The teachers valued this as well, but several still felt that there should be other options for certain students. Having other options was demonstrated at Bagley Middle. They continue to have a self-contained class for those low-functioning students.

The principals also valued a shared decision-making process when planning for the implementation of an inclusion program and relied heavily on their exceptional children staff; moreover on their EC case manager. This

researcher found that some of the principals had a contrasting perception of their

involvement and importance in the process of implementing an inclusion

program.  Some principals seemed to feel that they had a large part of creating

effective inclusion programs.  However, the teachers had the belief that they (the

teachers) were burdened with all the preparation, planning, and developing of an

inclusion program while they had low perceptions of the level of involvement of

their principals in the process.  This disconnect led to tensions and frustrations

on the part of the teachers.  The teachers felt as if they were being saddled with

all the work while the principal took a hands-off approach to implementation.

Common/collaborative planning time was believed to be crucial in the

effectiveness of implementation.  All those involved (regular and special

education teachers & administrators) should be given the opportunity to have a

voice in the implementation and sustainability of their inclusion program.

However, many principal perceptions reported stated a more, "we're doing it so

make it work" approach.  Collegiality was strengthened among the regular

education and special education teachers more so than with the principal.

Teachers reported that working so closely together during the planning,

developing, and training phase allowed them the opportunity to get to know each

other and develop relationships with each other based on mutual trust and

commitment.  At Bagley Middle, Ms. Johnson the EC case manager expressed

that collaboration is key when implementing inclusion.  She says that, "You have

to plan together.  You have to create a positive relationship in the best interest of the child to make inclusion work."

## Principal's Preparation and Professional Development

Professional development was overwhelmingly found to be an important factor in the implementation of an inclusion program.  Teachers need to reevaluate the way they are teaching and principals need to reevaluate the way they are leading.  Principals should focus on professional development on how to meet the individual needs of students and creating effective co-teaching classrooms.  None of the principals interviewed in this study actually facilitate the professional development, they did supply their teachers with quality training on how to create co-teaching classrooms in order to include special education students in the regular education classroom.  Inclusion program preparation needs to occur as professional development at the district level with specialists, consultants, and other support personnel.

## Principal's Knowledge, Vision, and Decision-Making

All three schools felt they did not have a choice in regards to implementing inclusion in their classrooms.  The participants' perceptions of their principal's vision is that "we have to do it, so here's what we're going to do".  In two of the schools, the teachers perceived their principals to have limited or little knowledge in regards to special education philosophy, research, programming, law and policy.  Their level of involvement was more of a delegator or monitor.  The "experts" in the building were the ones responsible for creating and planning

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inclusion programs.  Therefore their participation or involvement in the process was limited.  Their vision was not unique.

Researchers (Ainscow, 1999; Booth & Ainscow, 1988; Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson, 1999; Farrell, 2000) suggest the following points should be utilized when transforming a school to full inclusion:

- Start with existing practices and knowledge and make better use of the knowledge they already have.
    - This was expressed at Hawk Middle by the principal Mrs. Rivers sharing her vision of inclusion that she depended on her exceptional children teacher and the EC case manager to help her set up the program.
- See differences as opportunities for learning by welcoming diversity.
    - Mr. King demonstrated this at Bagley Middle by telling his teachers that since he doesn't have an exceptional children background he doesn't know how to develop an inclusion program.
- Recognize barriers to inclusion; leaders must recognize and address negative values that teachers may convey.
    - This was addressed at Salem Middle when the principal Mrs. Starling said that her vision was probably not positive but was one of urgency that they were going to have to do inclusion based on a mandate; that they were in survival mode.

- Make use of available resources to support learning including greater cooperation between teachers, instructional aides, parents, and the students themselves.
  - Collaboration was determined at all three middle schools as being an extremely important component of implementing a co-teaching inclusion program.
- Develop a language of inclusionary practice which includes common planning time for successful instructional practices to meet the needs of varying learning styles.
  - Being able to plan together is important for successful implementation of inclusion at Bagley Middle as pointed out by Mrs. Holiday a regular education teacher and the principal Mr. King.
- Create conditions that encourage and support risk-taking in teaching practices.
  - Mrs. Rivers the principal at Hawk Middle demonstrated this by pointing out how important it is that the staff knows that she believes inclusion is the right thing to do. Her buy-in to inclusion empowers her teachers to want to take risks and do what's best for students.

**Making the Change to Inclusive Culture**

How do principals facilitate the change to inclusive culture? Taking the time to investigate and evaluate what is the actual culture of their school is one

way. Teachers having opportunities to plan together and develop relationships

with each other strengthens the school culture.  Creating an atmosphere of

teamwork and collaboration also supports a positive school culture.  Supporting

inclusive practices needs to be communicated in the vision of the principal.

Fostering collaboration between teachers and principals is crucial to

implementing quality inclusion programs.  Teachers must be given opportunities

to plan together and meet regularly since co-teaching requires a culture of

working together.  Teamwork and collaboration were demonstrated at Hawk

Middle when Mrs. Rivers, the principal stated, "It's (inclusion) really opened up a

lot of conversation with administrators, regular education and exceptional

children teachers."  This relates to DiPaola and Thomas (2003) discussion about

how effective principals developed learning communities that emphasized shared

leadership, collaboration, and effective communication.

**Importance of Professional Development**

How important is principal's preparation and professional development?

Appropriate training and professional development on inclusive and co-teaching

practices is necessary to help teachers feel confident in making that transition to

teaching in an inclusion class along with planning and preparation.  Professional

development can be many different things.  It can be an outside trainer or

specialist, district personnel, or in-house staff using a "train the trainer" approach.

Going to other schools and observing co-teaching inclusion classes is another

way for teachers to see how their classrooms should be when they implement

inclusive co-taught classes.  At Salem Middle, teachers had ongoing workshops on co-teaching and inclusion which relates to Friend and Cook's (2010) six approaches to co-teaching and DiPaola and Thomas (2003) discussion that principals who demonstrate support for special education and provide high-quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities.  The principal doesn't necessarily have to be the facilitator of the professional development, but they must model their support of it to the teachers.  The professional development should be ongoing and not just a "here is what it is, now do it" type of training.  Sharing of best practices, modeling and observing are ways teachers can support each other's efforts.  The role of the principal here is more supportive than facilitative.

**Impact on Decision-Making**

How does a principal's knowledge and vision affect their decision-making with regard to implementing inclusion?  A principal may not have the knowledge of exceptional children programs or policy to implement an inclusion program, but they do have staff who are experts in that area and they will be given the task of developing the inclusion program.  This was demonstrated at all three schools in that the principals utilized their staff (regular education, special education, and EC case manager) to plan, develop, and implement inclusion programs which relates to Senge's (1990) reference to capacity building as creating a "learning organization". The principal should at least understand the needs of exceptional students and be able to communicate knowledge of sound instructional practices

when relating their vision.  If a principal takes a hands off approach to inclusion programming, then they should have delegated that task to teachers who are experts in developing and implementing inclusive practices.

## Implications from the Study

This case study examined the principal's role in the implementation of a middle school inclusion program.  Recommendations for the school administration, teachers and the school district central office, have emerged from the data findings in this study.  These recommendations will be discussed and conclusions will be offered with suggestions for further research.

## Implications for School Administrators

Teachers reported various levels of support from the principals.  Although it is necessary for site based administrators to support teachers in line with district objectives it was particularly evident at all schools that planning was not at the forefront of implementing inclusion programs.  It was more of a "we're going to do it so make it work" approach.  Implementing inclusion programs was a major change in some schools, so effective principal leadership is crucial.  In order for this form of leadership to occur, principals must begin to share responsibilities with teachers and other stakeholders in their school.

Making the change to sound inclusion programs was going to require adequate and relevant professional development.  It is evident that a shift from a district focus to a school focus was necessary.

Principals need to know and understand the concept of inclusion and what an inclusive philosophy should reflect. The principal is the educational leader of the building, and as such, his or her attitude and philosophy regarding students with special needs sets the tone for the building and is crucial for determining how students with disabilities access the general curriculum (Bateman, Bright, O'Shea, D, O'Shea, L, & Algozzine, 2007).

Principals need to understand that "the aim of inclusion is to "include" special needs students in ways that will increase their capacity to learn by exposing them to the same rigorous curriculum as the regular education children" (Ainscow, 1999; Dyson, Howes, Roberts, 2002).

The benefits of inclusion are many and the goal is to provide the special needs student with as many normal, inclusive experiences as their general education peers are afforded. According to a study listed on the Council for Exceptional Children's website,

In general, students with disabilities in inclusive settings have shown improvement in standardized tests, acquired social and communication skills previously undeveloped, shown increased interaction with peers, achieved more and high-quality IEP goals and are better prepared for post-school experiences. There is also evidence that inclusive settings can expand a student's personal interests and knowledge of the world, which is excellent preparation for adulthood" and children will not learn in segregated settings how to function in a non-disabled world. The real world is not divided into "regular" and "special" (Power-deFur and Orelove 2003).

The benefits of an inclusion program include: it helps to facilitate a more appropriate social behavior of the special needs students because of the higher expectations of the students in the regular education classroom, it helps to promote levels of achievement that are higher, or at least as high as, those

achieved in the self-contained classrooms, it offers social support because the special needs students are included with their non-disabled peers, and it improves the ability of all the students and teachers to adapt to different teaching and learning styles and to more openly accept diversity (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000).

Principals will need to change professional development from a focus on adult needs to a focus on student needs and learning outcomes, from an orientation toward transmission of knowledge and skills to teachers by "experts" to the study by teachers of the teaching and learning process, from a focus on generic instructional skills to a combination of generic and content-specific skills. Principals must also be an active participant in the professional development. Principals should advocate for teachers by providing better resources and support especially regarding inclusion and co-teaching best practices.

Principals must move beyond just being the "boss" and be a colleague, collaborator, and delegator. Principals must foster collaboration within their building and be an active participant in implementing and monitoring inclusion programs. Their vision of the inclusion program in their school should be clear and communicated with clarity and precision. More important, principals must trust those teachers who will be working with inclusion students. They need to know that their vision will be carried out and include teachers in the decision-making process. Stainback and Stainback (1989) stated, "As an inclusive principal, they accept the ownership of all students, support inclusive placement

decisions, promote the policy that students with disabilities are the responsibility of all school personnel and work to ensure an effective environment for all students" (p. 17).

In order for inclusion to be successful, the principal must exhibit behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Sage & Burrello, 1994).

Principals have to be life-long learners. Since it was reported that many principal's special education knowledge is limited, they simply cannot just let the inclusion program go by without knowing about co-teaching and what makes for an effective inclusion classroom. Principals need to know how to meet the needs of special education students. Principals cannot administer special education programs effectively without solid understanding of special education law and policy, more specifically IDEA.

**Implications for Teachers**

Teachers must be proactive in seeking help and support from their principals in regards to implementing and sustaining inclusion programs. Teachers should seek out and participate in professional development opportunities, attend meetings, follow up on advice and suggestions provided and take some responsibility for their own professional development.

Teachers should also be meeting regularly with each other. This includes regular education teachers meeting with special education teachers and vice versa. The principal and other support staff should be included in meetings also.

Collaboration is the key to success with regard to effective inclusion programs. Interview data indicated that some teachers did not feel that their principal was an active participant or was not involved in implementing inclusion practices beyond the initial planning and that they hoped principals and support staff would be more supportive in their efforts. The sharing of ideas and classroom strategies are essential in implementing effective inclusion programs. Co-teaching is a partnership where all teachers believe that it's "our" class, "our" room, "our" kids and it begins at the door. Another teacher or professional should be able to walk into a co-taught classroom and not be able to determine which teacher is the regular education teacher and which teacher is the special education teacher. Furthermore, who the special education students are and are not should not be able to be determined. In a true co-taught classroom, all students are integrated into the classroom curriculum and environment.

### Implications for Central Office Policy and Administration

To meet the needs of special education students in the regular education classroom, educators need to reevaluate the way they are teaching and school systems need to reexamine the model in which they are utilizing professional development opportunities. Elmore (2002) notes, "We put an enormous amount of energy into changing structures and usually leave instructional practice

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untouched" (p.1).  Research supports the move from fragmented, piecemeal

efforts to professional development driven by a clear, coherent strategic plan for

the district, each school, and even each department.  Sarason (1990) and Fullan

(1991) have criticized school systems for their fragmented approach to change

and "one-shot" professional development experiences.  They advocate a

comprehensive approach to professional development that looks at all systems

(assessment, instruction, delivery, curriculum, and parent involvement) working

together toward a common outcome or vision.

This being said, central office administrators need to be able to support

principals and teachers and offer quality professional development on how to

implement and sustain inclusion co-taught regular education classrooms.

Burrello (1988) provided guidelines for supervisors of special education relative

to their role as the cultural leader including that the attitude of the building

principal helps determine the attitude of the staff toward the special education

program.  He also suggested the importance of communicating the value of a

shared responsibility for all students, setting high expectations that all students

can learn, and a willingness to learn about individual differences as part of the

role of the principal.

Professional development opportunities need to address the specific

needs of inclusion teachers and not just a "canned" program for all teachers.

Central office administrators should seek to provide site specific professional

development opportunities such as sending a team of paraprofessionals to the particular schools that are experienced in co-teaching and inclusion practices.

Central office administrators must also be present and visible in schools on a regular basis when implementing inclusion to offer help and support to the teachers. They should be observing co-taught classrooms, meeting with regular education and special education teachers as well as meeting with principals to discuss what is working and what support they need.

### Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that future research in implementing inclusion programs focus on central office and site based support. This recommendation is based on the findings of this case study as the data indicated that some teachers felt more supported than others. The school district should also address the need for the school administration to be accountable in implementing and sustaining inclusion programs. Data collection techniques that acquire information from more recent sources and programs would add to the current research. Also, studying the effects of the change in leadership on the implementation of inclusion programs would yield in supplementing current research.

### Conclusions

Using the three research questions as a foundation, this study used a qualitative, case study research approach to reflect the perceptions that principals, teachers (both regular education and special education), and central

office support staff have on developing and implementing special education inclusion programs in their schools.

The purpose of this study was to provide principals' and others' perspectives on developing and implementing inclusion programs in schools and to examine how principals' knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice affects how they implement special education programs. The findings in this study indicate that there is not a rubric, process or plan for principal leadership for special education. Inconsistencies existed in several areas mentioned by the participants in terms of the perceptions of principals versus the perceptions of the teachers.

During the course of this study, three themes arose from the data using research questions: 1.Facilitating the Change to Inclusive Culture, 2. Principal's Preparation and Professional Development, 3. Principal's Knowledge, Vision, and Decision Making.

The first theme investigated how a school culture will or will not change as a result of implementing an inclusive culture, what the processes or steps were (or not) that principals used to facilitate the change to inclusive culture, and the importance of collaboration when implementing an inclusive culture.

The second theme investigated what type, if any professional development did principals participate in when implementing an inclusion program, did the principal facilitate any of the professional development that took

place for their teachers, and how principals' involvement was perceived in implement an inclusion program.

The third theme investigated the perceptions of teachers and staff of their principal's knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice, how principals get knowledge of special education law, policy, and practice, and the perceptions of teachers and staff on whether their principal takes a hands on or a hands off approach to special education leadership.

Principals must be instructional leaders in their schools in order to adhere to federal, state, and local mandates as well as being able to discern that the programs for students with disabilities are being developed and implemented with fidelity to meet the needs of those students.

At one time, the principal was seen as the manager of a school. He/she was responsible for creating student and teacher schedules and overseeing the day-to-day building operations. That role has now expanded to become an instructional leader that must not only manage a building, but also lead a school through changes that enhance the education of all students, including special education students. The varying roles of a principal's role in implementing an inclusion program that developed throughout this case study include the principal as a: visionary, collaborator, colleague, manager, and life-long learner.

Principals implementing inclusion programs must be visionary leaders. They must know themselves and be able to articulate their vision as it relates to a program or process. The visionary principal must be true to their vision and

continuously work to keep their teachers focused on creating and sustaining effective inclusion programs.  In order for a principal to be a visionary leader they must be confident to take risks and to support teachers to be comfortable enough to take risks themselves to improve their inclusion teaching practices and help students grow.  Principals need to know their students and be willing to "step out of the box" in order to be visionary leaders to meet the needs of their students while still adhering to special education law and policy.

Principals need to realize they are not the sole person responsible for implementing inclusion programs.  For a principal to have an effective role in implementing inclusion program they have to be advocated for collaboration, shared decision-making, and team work.  All the principals in this case study utilized the expertise of their teachers to plan and implement an inclusion program.

Principals implementing inclusion programs need to build trusting relationships with all those involved in the process.  Principals in this case study stressed the importance of listening to their teachers, giving them support, and learning together.  This research study focused on ways principals and support personnel (i.e. staff-teachers/administrators) work together or collaborate in developing and implementing an inclusion program; factors in principal preparation and professional development programs that influence principals' perspectives and perceptions of special education; and  how principals establish a vision, make decisions, and allocate/arrange resources when their schools are

implementing inclusion programs.  Collaboration should be a crucial element to

creating and maintaining successful inclusive schools.  However, in schools

today, the term *collaboration* is used in many ways, often contributing to

confusion, rather than clarity, about ideas, programs, and services (Cook &

Friend, 2010).

There is research that discusses principals' roles in inclusion and leading

special education programs.  There are many ways that principals can facilitate

inclusion as well as support teachers' implementation of academic

accommodations.

> The principal determines the climate and degree to which this process is successful.  Principals must provide staff with adequate training, access to support personnel, and opportunities for professional development regarding best practices in teaching students with disabilities.  It is also important that principals know the relevant provisions of IDEA and NCLB so they can help staff members establish proper systems for assessing needs and making decisions on an ongoing basis.  Further, principals should consider three key factors in the provision of reasonable academic accommodations:  selecting appropriate accommodations and including them in the IEP, effectively implementing the IEP accommodations, and evaluating the effectiveness of the academic accommodations in meeting the student's academic goals as determined by the IEP (Martinez & Humphreys, 2006).

Principals cannot forget what it means to be a manager, and may have to

revert back to being a manger during the change to inclusion.  Boscardin (2005)

states that "secondary school administrators will need to redefine their

leadership, transforming the dual system of general and special education

administration to a distributed system of leadership that collaboratively supports

the use of proven practices to achieve school-wide improvement for students with disabilities" (p. 31).  Boscardin also states that:  "two ways of creating supportive administrative roles are to shift the role of the administrator from one of manager to one of instructional leader, and to use leadership strategies to establish effective evidence-based instructional practices that improve the educational outcomes for all students" (p. 31).

If teachers are expressing opposition to transitioning to inclusion and not doing their part (i.e. not participating in the professional development, not co-teaching, not making appropriate accommodations with students) the principal must address the situation directly.  During this case study, opposition was discussed however those teachers realize the benefits of inclusion and therefore were on board.

Along with collaboration, professional development is a key component in implementing inclusion programs.  In order for the teachers to value the professional development experiences, the administrators and other support staff must participate alongside the teachers.  By learning together, the principal is showing his/her commitment to making the change to inclusion.

Co-teaching requires a culture of working together and that was something that all participants agreed on; that in a co-teaching inclusion program, collaboration has to be utilized.  The most important factor observed in this research study to successfully implementing inclusionary practices is the opportunity for regular education and special education teachers to be able to

collaborate and plan together.  The role of the principal in this process is

perceived to be one of support rather than participation.

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**CONSENT FORMS**

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**

***CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM***

Project Title: <u>The Principal's Role in the Implementation of a Middle School Inclusion Program</u>

Project Director: <u>Dara J. Hedgecock</u>

Participant's Name:   <u>                                       </u>

**What is the study about?**
This research study is an investigation into what leadership roles and functions develop during the implementation of inclusion programs for students with disabilities.

**Why are you asking me?**
The reason for your being selected as a participant in this study is your experience and expertise in working with students with disabilities and your work in the inclusion program in your school.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**
Participants in this study will be asked to review an interview questionnaire and be prepared to respond to those questions during an in-person interview. The in-person interview should take from thirty to ninety minutes.

**Is there any audio/video recording?**
All in-person interviews will be audio taped.

**What are the dangers to me?**
 The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape by keeping all information in a secure filing cabinet at the residence of Dara Hedgecock.

If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research and Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482.  Questions about this project or your benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dara  Hedgecock who may be contacted at (336) 391-7897([djhedge7@yahoo.com](mailto:djhedge7@yahoo.com)) or Carl Lashley at (336)334-3745 (carl.lashley@gmail.com).

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**
 There are no material benefits to participants in the study. Participants will experience the satisfaction of participating in a student to discover what leadership roles emerge from the implementation of an inclusion/co-teaching classroom.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**
 This research will reveal the effectiveness of the principal's role in the implementation of an inclusion program for students with disabilities.

**Will I get paid for being in the study?  Will it cost me anything?**
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**
All information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet drawer at the residence of Dara Hedgecock. Computer files will be password protected. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty.  If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way.  If you choose to

withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**
By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study.  All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Dara Hedgecock.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

## APPENDIX B

## PARTICPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your feelings about inclusion?

2. What type of environment do you feel is best for students with disabilities?

3. What actions were done to facilitate the change to inclusionary practices?

4. Do you feel the school culture is better or worse because of inclusion?

5. How did the principal (you) share his/her (your) vision on inclusion?

6. What do you perceive the principal's knowledge of special education procedure and policy to be?

7. How would you describe your principal's (your) level of involvement in meeting the needs of special education students?

8. Has the relationships between teachers and administration changed as a result of the implementation of an inclusion program?

9. Is fostering collaboration between teachers and administration seen to be important with regards to implementing inclusionary practices?

10. What types of professional development have you participated in with regard to implementing inclusionary practices?

11. Have you facilitated the professional development?

12. How does the building level principal (you) facilitate professional development?

13. What is your role in the inclusive process at your school?

14. Does a special education teacher come into the regular classroom?  Do the classrooms use a co-teaching method for instruction?

15. What is the most important factor you would attribute to the success of the implementation of inclusive practices in this school?

16. How important was the principal's (your) role in managing the change to inclusion?

17. What changes, if any, would you make to the current inclusion implementation practices at your school?

18. What is your perception of your role in implementing inclusionary practices in this school?