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# A Case Study of Middle School Teachers' Attitudes of Inclusion of Students With Disabilities

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An Applied Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Transformational Leadership

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs in general education middle school classrooms. Extant literature shows that factors such as teachers' experiences with students with disabilities, ability to manage diverse classroom behaviors, understanding of individual disabilities, collaboration, self-efficacy, available resources, and school leadership support affect teachers' willingness to consent to the inclusion model. Research reveals that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are greatly influenced by their experiences with students with disabilities and extent and level of collaboration in the school. These are the greatest predictors of employing a successful inclusion classroom model.

The present study employed a case study approach utilizing questionnaires and follow-up interview questions for the selected teachers to examine their attitudes toward inclusion. Teachers' experiences and collaboration revealed to be strongly connected with teachers' attitudes toward students with disability. The results indicate that special education teachers more than general education teachers feel adequately prepared in teaching the students with disabilities. Teachers in this study felt that their instructional activities had improved as a result of their work in collaboration, demonstrating a positive relationship between collaboration and increased teacher experience with students with disabilities.



*Keywords:* teachers, attitudes, regular classroom, students with disabilities, inclusion, self-efficacy, collaboration.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Late Chief E.U. Duru and Lolo V. Duru. My late father had little education but strongly believe in the power of education. He challenged all his children to invest in education. Daddy, I did it and may the glory be to God, the benefactor of wisdom and knowledge, Amen!

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction to the Problem

Education for students with disabilities has vastly changed since the 1970s. Before then, students often did not have educational opportunities equal to their peers without disabilities. According to the revised Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), some students with disabilities were not educated in public schools, while others who participated were often limited in their educational experiences because their disabilities went undetected. The enactment of education laws that culminated to the implementation of IDEA (2004) mandated the schools to provide equal educational opportunities to students with disabilities in the least environment. IDEA was first created under the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In 1990, it became IDEA and has since been reauthorized twice: 1997 and 2004.

One of the main purposes of the Revised IDEA (2004) was to ensure that all eligible students with disabilities are provided with an appropriate education and related services to meet their specific needs, and to prepare them for employment and independent living once they graduated high school. Another main purpose of the legislation was to guarantee that educators have the necessary supports to increase the success of their students with disabilities. One provision of IDEA is a least restrictive environment, which means that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated alongside children without disabilities (inclusion). According to the IDEA, only when education in the general education classroom cannot be achieved (assuming the use of supplementary and supportive services were exhausted) can the school change placement into a more restricted environment.

There has been a steady movement to include students with disabilities, which includes students with mild to severe disabilities in the general education classroom. The 37th Annual

report to Congress on implementation of the IDEA Act (2015) stated that from 2004 through 2013, the percentage of students, ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, educated inside the regular class 80% or more of the day increased achievement scores from 51.8 to 62.1 percent. The percentage of students, ages 6 through 21, served under IDEA, Part B, educated inside the regular class no more than 79% of the day and no less than 40% of the day decreased from 26.4 percent in 2004 to 19.2 percent in 2013. Jackie Mader (2017) expressed that the national push to take students with disabilities out of isolation means most spend the majority of their days in general-education classrooms, rather than in separate special-education classes. That means general-education teachers are teaching more students with disabilities. Osgood (2005) asserted that "historically, educators resisted the integration of "exceptional" children who, because they did not fit into the rigid structures of American schooling, "overtaxed the efficient operation of schools" (p. 24). Osgood pointed to the emergence of the Disability Rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s in the increasing demand for inclusive placements as a matter of civil rights has increased the demand for full inclusion. Finally, the (2005) landmark Pennsylvania Supreme Court settlement on the Gaskins case, which reinforces existing federal mandates, and stipulates that special needs students are required to receive their education within the least restrictive environment, increased the push for inclusive classroom situations by school districts.

The United States Department of Education's policy statement on inclusion (2015) asserted that the children with disabilities in early childhood programs should be educated with their peers without disabilities. These students will be held to high expectations as their non-disabled peers while promoting their participation in all learning and social activities. The policy statement also emphasized that the students' participation in the general education setting should

be facilitated by individualized accommodations as well as evidence-based services to foster their development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging. The policy statement expresses the commitment by the school as mandated by IDEA, to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate in school. Inclusion, as defined by Gal, Schreur, and Engel-Yeger (2010), "is a philosophy of acceptance and belonging to the community so that a class is structured to meet the needs of all students" (pp. 89-91). The authors also emphasized that efforts to create an environment accepting of inclusion has met resistance and attitudinal barriers.

One of the reasons for inclusion is to fulfill the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was first created under the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In 1990, it became IDEA and has since been reauthorized twice: 1997 and 2004. The act among other things, states that all children with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment. This provision specifies that, to the maximum extent appropriate, disabled children either in private or public facilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers. The United States Department of Education (2006) stated that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team may determine that the child cannot be educated satisfactorily in the regular education classroom, even when supplementary aids and services are provided. An alternative placement must then be considered. The schools are required to ensure that "a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services" [§300.115(a)]. The law states that a continuum of placement options be made available to meet the special needs of students. Gal, Schreur and Engel-Yeager (2010) underscored the importance of choice of an adapted environment for these groups of individuals with certain characteristics.

According to the Center for Studies on Inclusion Education (CSIE; 2004) report, all students share equal value and status. The report contended that exclusion of students with disabilities from the mainstream setting because of disability or learning difficulty is "a devaluation of their self-worth as individuals" (p. 6). The practice of exclusion is also discriminatory and holds children accountable for circumstances for which they are not responsible. According to the report, inclusion in education should be concerned with breaking down barriers to learning and increasing participation for all students, treating all learners based on equality and nondiscrimination. This extended understanding of inclusive education was articulated in the meeting at the forty-eighth session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Conference on Education, held in Geneva in November 2008. It was acknowledged that "inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (UNESCO, 2009, p.126).

According to Lopes et al. (2004), students with special needs "present serious challenges to teachers because they are difficult, time-consuming, and frustrating" (p. 413). The type of disability can influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Ryan, 2009, p.185). These challenges tend to influence the attitude of the teachers towards inclusion. Among the problems mentioned are the following:

- lack of training, shortage of teaching and learning materials,
- large class sizes,
- lack of adequate time for planning,
- poor governmental and parents support,
- poor working environment and

- difficulties in supporting pupils with different disabilities especially in primary schools. (Rakap and Kaczmarek, 2010)

Ross-Hill (2009) also expressed that lack of consistent and substantial training brings about "tension, stress, and strain for both teachers and students alike in inclusive settings" (p. 189).

**Background, Context, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Inclusion expresses the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and requires only that the child benefit from being in the class rather than having to keep up with the other students (Stout, 2001). The IDEA asserted that,

> Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by providing appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom to such children, whenever appropriate. (2004)

Special needs students have the right to receive necessary curricular adaptations. These adaptations include accommodations and modifications to instructions. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2006), accommodations are alterations in the way tasks are presented such that children with a disability can complete the same assignments as other children. Examples of accommodations are extended time, frequent breaks, varying of activities preferential seating, and varied teaching approaches. Modifications, on the other hand, involve lowering the level of materials presented to facilitate students understanding of the curriculum, and simplifying the vocabulary, concepts and principles. Students who receive accommodations have the same academic expectations as their general education classmates; on

the other hand, modifications entail changes that lower these expectations. Curricular adaptations vary based upon each learner's individual needs. These accommodations and modifications are sometimes necessary for the students with special needs in an inclusion environment.

To attain full implementation of inclusion in schools, there has to be total commitment of staff, teachers and administrators in the schools. A positive attitude of the general education and special education teachers in inclusive classes is important because they are responsible for the modifications and adaptations of the instructional strategies to accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities. Teachers who have favorable attitudes toward inclusion generally believe that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms, they can learn there, and the teachers have confidence in their abilities to teach students with disabilities (Berry, 2010). The consequence of this provision of IDEA has made inclusion an educational priority and necessary for school districts. Under the act, all children with disabilities receive an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and an IEP team considers the general education classroom as the appropriate placement for the child. If the general education setting is appropriate by the IEP team, then a legitimate rationale must be alternative placements (Leyser, 2002).

**History and Theoretical Basis for Inclusion**

The history of education for students with disabilities in our school district was characterized largely as exclusionary rather than inclusionary until the passage of the Education for All Children Act in the 1970s. A good number of students with disabilities were denied free public education and many more were poorly served by public schools. Prior to the enactment of the landmark Education for All Children Act (also known as Public Law 94-142), only one in five students with disabilities in the US were educated in public schools. Dudley-Marling and

Burns (2014) expressed that the requirement that all children be educated in the "least restrictive environment" gradually allowed many students with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities and today a majority of students with disabilities spend more than 80% of their school days in regular classroom settings. Still, the meaning of inclusion is bitterly disputed and fueled in large part by two contrasting views of disability.

Traditionally, students found eligible for services under IDEA have been served in separate program models according to their handicapping conditions. However, recent laws and policies have made it possible for these students with disabilities to return to the general classrooms settings. These changes have encountered ambivalent responses from teachers and slow the complete and effective integration of students with disabilities in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers especially students with intellectual disabilities changes in practice (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Gibbs, 2007; Jobling & Moni, 2004). Osgood (2005) observed that, a substantial percentage of the students with disabilities until very recently were considered incapable of being educated. The disabled students were completely excluded from public schooling. Even those students with disabilities who were considered "educable" were typically segregated within schools since it was presumed that these students had unique educational needs requiring the services of specially trained professionals. Historically educators resisted the integration of "exceptional" children who, because they did not fit into the rigid structures of American schooling, "overtaxed the efficient operation of schools" (p. 24).

IDEA was first created under the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In 1990, it became IDEA and has since been reauthorized twice: 1997 and 2004 attempted to end the long history of the exclusion of the students with disabilities from the public school system. The law assured that a free appropriate public education must be available to all students with

disabilities no matter how significant their disability, has become a hallmark of education policy in the society. Public Law 94-142 also guaranteed a free education for all students with disabilities. It required school districts to provide students with disabilities with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) to ensure that these students received an education program appropriate to their particular needs. The extent this policy was being implemented depends on the school district. It gave school districts various latitudes in implementing the program. Michalko (2008) observes that, despite the intention of PL 94-142 that all students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment, since the passage of the *Education for All Children Act* there has been an "unfettered growth of overwhelmingly segregated arrangements" (p. 2133). Still, the most recent data indicate that the vast majority of students with disabilities in the United States ages six through 21 spend at least part of their educational day in regular education settings. Recently, for most of the students with disabilities, at least part of their school day involves being educated alongside children without disabilities (31st Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Regardless of the intent of the law, the new guidelines stipulate that school districts are "required to provide a qualified student with a disability an opportunity to benefit from the school district's program equal to that of students without disabilities" (Pilon, 2013, p. D5). From a traditional special education perspective, the meaning of inclusion follows the legal requirement that students with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE). The assumption is that the regular classroom is the LRE for every child but not necessarily the most appropriate placement for all children (Hyatt & Filler, 2011). The regular classroom is the appropriate placement for students with disabilities if they are able to function

in the regular classroom without significantly altering the regular education curriculum or student expectations (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Inclusion is linked to a service delivery model including the technical implementation of a set of research-based practices (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). As Liasidou (2010) describes it, "the focus is on enabling disabled students to 'overcome' barriers to learning and participation by devising 'specialist' educational measures and interventions . . . intended to respond to students' right to education" (p. 171).

To make the inclusion of the students with disabilities in the general education setting effective, teachers must come to understand their beliefs, values, assumptions and positioning. They must be aware of the predispositions that they bring with them to the classroom each day. The successful implementation of inclusive educational programs has been linked to teacher attitude towards inclusion (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fisher, 2000). A truly inclusive setting will ensure that individual needs of the students with disabilities are taken into consideration in differentiating instructions in the classroom. The teachers should also see themselves as active change agents who are poised to providing effective learning opportunities to all students in their classes regardless of their various disabilities.

**Statement of the Problem**

In today's middle schools, students with disabilities are placed in general education settings at increasing rates, which has direct implications on their educational opportunities and quality of life (Wiebe & Kim, 2008). The middle schools in the school district under study have seen such increase in the number of students with disabilities in inclusive classes largely due to the implementation of IDEA. The school district is in a diverse metropolitan city with four middle schools implementing inclusive setting in core subjects' areas. The school district is concerned with recruiting and maintaining teachers with high self-efficacy and collaborative

standards to provide adequate and effective learning opportunities to all students in general education classrooms. Some researchers perceive teacher experience as a benefit of teacher collaboration. Collaboration allows teachers to use a collection of ideas, strategies and experiences in their individual classrooms. Williams (2010) stated that collaboration builds self-efficacy by allowing teachers to exert competency of their professional lives. Effective teacher collaboration allows teachers to reflect on their instructional practices and become more confident in their professional abilities.

Berry (2010) expressed that teachers who have favorable attitudes toward inclusion generally believe that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms, that they can learn there, and that the teachers have confidence in their abilities to teach students with disabilities. Studies examining the attitudes of inclusive teachers' point to the necessity of a positive attitude toward the practice of inclusion and toward students with disabilities (Ross-Hill, 2009). Traditionally, regular education teachers have been apprehensive towards inclusive practices, either because of their inability to accommodate students with special needs in their classrooms, because they feel they lack the necessary time to supplement the curriculum, or because they simply do not favor inclusive practices in general (Ross-Hill, 2009). Teachers in inclusion should be provided with professional development opportunities and other resources in the form of information and tools (LaBarbera, 2017).

In an informal discussion I had with other teachers in inclusive classrooms, they express a lack of adequate and continuous training, skills, or knowledge to effectively teach students with disabilities. As a result, without adequate resources, most general education teachers in the school district react negatively to the idea of full inclusion. For inclusion to be successful, teachers need to have positive attitudes and beliefs about students with disabilities in the general

education classroom. When there is a lack of self-efficacy and collaboration, the quality of education and students with disabilities' performances in inclusion classes are therefore questioned. As more students with disabilities access the general education classroom environment, the community must find ways to support the regular education teachers and to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion. Providing teachers with the training and tools necessary to foster positive attitudes about inclusion is a key step to ensuring the success of inclusion (Colber, 2010).

The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requiring 100% academic proficiency for all students, and the Standard of Learning (SOL), high-stakes testing, have placed additional pressures on the general education teachers. The general and special education teachers make daily decisions regarding the students in their classes, while understanding that their own progress depends largely on the academic performance of these students. The students with disabilities tend to be blamed if the classes do not have favorable SOL results. Therefore, the intention of this research study is to determine whether the general and special education teachers have the resources and support needed in creating and maintaining successful inclusion programs. A study into the perceptions of inclusive teachers about their students with disabilities may yield unique insights regarding the educational experiences and opportunities of these students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' attitudes of inclusion students. This study was designed to determine: (1) What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities;
(2) How the general and special education teachers collaborate in their inclusive classrooms,

which is an important aspect of effective inclusion.

**Research Questions**

This study builds on previous studies on special and general education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting by examining the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities?
2. How do middle school special and general education teachers collaborate in their inclusive classrooms?

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The rational for this study stems from the knowledge that most students with disabilities are not educated in full and effective inclusion classrooms. Teachers in inclusive settings have mixed beliefs about inclusion, which affects their willingness to utilize research-based practices. Some believe they have the ability to teach students with disabilities in regular classrooms and that inclusive settings provide positive effects on the learning outcomes of students with disabilities, yet others have concerns about feeling unprepared to provide the necessary instruction in inclusive classrooms (Cooper et al., 2008). The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting as it is practiced today leaves classroom teachers without full collaboration, training, and other supports necessary to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms.

The implementation of Inclusion as identified by IDEA (2004) is an ongoing process, as well as the search to find ways to identify and remove various challenges for the teachers in the classroom (Engelbrecht & Green, 2009). Teachers continue to struggle with the implementation

thereof, while they are also required to maintain high quality education practices (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014). As many as 65% of mainstream teachers do not have a formal initial teacher education qualification that included training in how to respond issues in mainstream classrooms, and to diverse learning needs (Dreyer, Engelbrecht & Swart, 2012). The teachers' self-efficacy is therefore an important aspect of the implementation to the extent that it determines the success or failure of inclusion in the general education setting. The results of some of the studies show that teachers believe that they are not able to provide the support needed in classrooms and that the needs of especially learners with disabilities are best met in separate classrooms (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Dreyer, Engelbrecht, & Swart, 2012; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013).

Other stakeholders like parents, staff, and administrators expressed concerns about the implementation of inclusion. The attitudes and perceptions of general education teachers are therefore paramount to the implementation of effective inclusion in the schools. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 states:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom. (p. 1)

The need for complete and effective inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting depends on the teachers' positive attitude and perceptions of special and general education teachers in the classrooms. Timmerman and Mulvihill (2015) found that students with disabilities believe that faculty do not understand the academic accommodation needs of students with disabilities. However, when they do understand, it can improve these students' attitudes towards academic learning. For this reason, it is critical that future research can explore on evaluating the attitudes of teachers toward students with disabilities. Information from this study will be made available to the general education teachers and the special education teachers in the school district. It highlights the importance of effective comprehension and implementation of inclusion.

The inclusion pedagogy has also been viewed from the perspectives of social justice, equity and fairness. All students deserve access to quality education and students with disabilities are no exception. In present schools, there are still some students that struggle to gain equality of opportunity and social justice in their educational systems. Sapon-Shevin (2003) states the following:

> Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice . . .. Inclusion demands that we ask, what kind of world do we want to create? What kinds of skills and commitment do people need to thrive in a diverse society? By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us. (pp. 26, 28)

The emerging representations of teachers and staff collaborations in the school inclusion classes are expected to rally resources to produce greater student achievement. When teachers engage in high quality collaboration that they perceive

as extensive and helpful, there is both an individual and collective benefit. For example, high quality collaboration among teachers is associated with increases in their students' achievement, there performance and their peers' students' achievement (Lipton & Wellman, 2012).

Boer, Pijl, and Minnaer (2009) reviewed 26 studies investigating regular primary school teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of special needs students and found that most teachers hold either neutral or negative attitudes toward inclusion. This study examined the importance of teacher collaboration, sharing ideas, teaching techniques and increasing the teacher efficacy in inclusive classrooms. Teachers and staff responses toward the acquisition and sharing of the school data are of vital importance in the collaborative process. One of the ways most school have encouraged collaboration is through introduction of the Professional Leaning Community (PLC) model. It also involves small groups of teachers who come together in teams to help one another improve student learning. PLCs also encourage collective creativity and supportive conditions by reducing isolation and creating shared responsibility for students (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). PLCs have helped teachers learn together as they rethink their practice, challenge existing assumptions about instruction, and reexamine their students' learning needs. By embracing collaborative approach to professional development, teachers are building their ability to work in teams and to problem solve two areas that the standards movement has identified as critical to prepare students for postsecondary success (Thessin & Starr, 2011).

Fuchs (2010) researched general education teachers' attitudes towards mainstreaming practices. Fuchs found that teachers were candid in their perception of lack of sufficient planning time, collaboration time, and instructional time. Additionally, it was found that the participants

perceived low levels of administrative support, unrealistic job expectations and responsibilities. Administrators have an important task in communicating clear expectations of inclusive character and promoting an atmosphere of efficacy (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Goman (2014) asserted that innovative and insightful school leaders need the commitment and team spirit of the staff and other employees in the system. Collaboration of all the members of the team will ensure that effective changes are implemented in the school. Successful inclusion has resulted to increased understanding of teachers as teachers of all students, not just as teachers of children with disabilities (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009).

A review of related studies on the experiences general and special education teachers reported by the participants show that successful inclusion resulted in increased understanding of difference and diversity by the typically developing students in the classroom (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009). Some of the reviewed studies have also shown that teachers have differing opinions about the inclusion of the students with disabilities in their classes. The kind and extent of the student's disability do affect the willingness of the teachers to accommodate them in their classes. Most of the teachers do feel that they are not capable of managing the behavior of students with severe behaviors in their classes and therefore have negative attitudes towards inclusion (Cassidy 2011). The amount of time that students with disabilities spend in general education is positively correlated with better outcomes after high school in the areas of employment and independent living (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2005).

The results of the current study will provide educators and educational policy developers' insights on the needs for effective collaboration and teachers' efficacy in inclusive classrooms. **Research Setting**

The study examined the attitude about inclusion of middle school teachers in one Mid- Atlantic school district. The schools in this district are built around the values of strong education, community participation, and prosperity for all. The school programs show that the district capitalizes on its urban advantage to prepare life-long learners for the world of tomorrow. The belief that all students, disability or not, can be successful is central to the district's mission. These ideals led to the development of the district's school philosophy of learning which describes the excellent educational opportunities that they strive for daily. The school district serves 17,000 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and provides a wide array of core, elective, gifted and special education opportunities. The school district also has a wide range of diversity among the students and staff. With an equally diverse curriculum and a wide variety of learning opportunities, teachers focus on individual needs and interests. The core academic areas of reading, science, math, and social studies are emphasized at all grade levels, along with the state's SOL tests.

**Definition of Terms**

The following operational terms and definitions were used to describe background information, to relate the significance of research, and to identify concepts that will be investigated.

**Emotional disability**. IDEA (2004) defined emotional disability as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period and to a marked degree, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. It is an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers . . . and a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

**General education**. Webster (2015) defined general education as the program of education that typically developing children should receive, based on state standards and evaluated by the annual state educational standards test.

**Highly qualified**. According to No Child Left Behind (2002), each state must have a plan to ensure that all teachers providing instruction in core academic subjects were highly qualified by 2005-2006. To be considered highly qualified, teachers must be fully licensed and have an endorsement in the area in which they are teaching. Teacher assistants must meet rigorous new standards.

**Inclusion**. Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school (InclusionBC, 2017).

**Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)**. This is the actual detailed written description of a child's personalized educational program (IDEA, 2004).

**Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA)**. This act strengthened academic expectations and accountability for children with disabilities and bridged the gap that too often existed between what children with disabilities learn and what is required in the regular curriculum (IDEA, 2004).

**Learning disabled**. This term applies to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (IDEA, 2004).

**Mainstreaming.** This term is used when considering placement of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings (IDEA, 2004).

**Other health impaired**. This applies to individuals having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that result in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and diabetes and adversely affects a child's educational performance (IDEA, 2004).

**Special education**. It is the practice of educating students with Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in a way that addresses their individual differences. According to IDEA (2004), special education,

> is specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in the hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, and instruction in physical education. (p. 12)

**Speech/language impaired**. This is a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance (IDEA, 2004).

**Standard of learning (SOL).** VDOE (2017) explained the Standards of learning for Virginia public schools. It established learning and achievement expectations for core subjects for grades K-12.

## Assumptions

The researcher assumed that the participating teachers were honest in reporting their perceptions of standards usage and confidence in the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting. The inclusion criteria of the sample are appropriate and therefore, ensure that the participants have all experienced the same or similar phenomenon of the study.

## Delimitation

The study was delimited to public middle schools' teachers in the inclusion setting including the ones in core courses. It was also being delimited to public middle schools in the district under study.

**Limitations**

The researcher recognizes that there are certain limitations inherent in conducting this research study, which include that some of the respondents, particularly those new to the school, may not have adequate knowledge of the issues or concepts pertaining to the inclusion of special education students in the general educational setting. A limitation may be selection bias, as participants chose to participate or not. The generalizability of the results to all middle school given that only one district in the one region of the country is sampled is another limitation.

**Summary**

The purpose of the study was to examine teacher's attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs in general education middle school classrooms. The literature review revealed that general and special education teachers feel that lack of knowledge of special education does affect their ability to teach the students with disabilities in their respective classes.

The United States Department of Education estimated that the number of students with disabilities that are being served in general education settings will continue to grow. The general education teachers' ability and capability to deal with the increased number of students with disabilities determines largely the effectiveness of the inclusion program. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), does not require inclusion. Instead, the law requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" to meet their "unique needs." In addition, the IDEA contemplates that the "least restrictive

environment" analysis will begin with placement in the regular education classroom. The federal and state policies have mandated full inclusion, also making the teachers accountable for students' performance regardless of disability. The general and special education teachers' positive or negative perceptions about inclusion process could affect the performance of these students in their classes. The inclusive teachers should also be cognizant of any negative perception about inclusion that could have an adverse effect on the outcome of all students.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

Teachers who have favorable attitudes toward inclusion generally believe that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms, that they can learn there, and that the teachers have confidence in their abilities to teach students with disabilities (Berry, 2010). The teachers' attitudes of inclusion tend to be an important factor in providing students with disabilities adequate and effective learning experiences in the general education classroom. Studies examining the attitudes of inclusive teacher point to the necessity of a positive attitude toward the practice of inclusion and toward students with disabilities (Ross-Hill, 2009). Traditionally, regular education teachers have been apprehensive towards inclusive practices, either because of their inability to accommodate students with special needs in their classrooms, because they feel they lack the necessary time to supplement the curriculum, or because they simply do not favor inclusive practices in general (Ross-Hill, 2009).

Berry (2010) expressed that a teacher who believes that inclusion is unfair to typically achieving students, may act in subtle (or not so subtle) ways that negatively affect students with disabilities in that classroom. It may be that the presence or absence of positive attitudes and a sense of commitment to principles of inclusion can tip teachers toward making or avoiding efforts to teach students with disabilities (p. 76). "The goal of an inclusive education system is to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential" (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 1). The author also stipulated that it is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of and belonging for all students regardless of disability.

Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) expressed that collaborative practice is integral to effective inclusion. They posited that within schools, teacher collaboration could foster communities of practice through a series of professional relationships that enhance the educational experience and learning outcomes of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Leana (2011) identified collaboration as the missing link in the student's achievement and expressed that:

> When a teacher needs information or advice about how to do her job more effectively, she goes to other teachers. She turns far less frequently to the experts and is even less likely to talk to her principal. Further, when the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve. (p. 80)

Collaboration, though often represented as synonymous with co-teaching, rather includes co-teaching as one subset of skills needed to educate students with disabilities in twenty-first century schools (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 77). The aim of this study was to examine the teachers' perceptions of inclusion of students with disabilities in middle school in Mid-Atlantic school district. More specifically, how middle school teachers in inclusion classrooms in this district perceive themselves adapting instruction to the needs of students with disabilities and the extend they collaborate in their inclusive classrooms was the subject of investigation.

**Understanding Inclusion in Classroom**

ASCD (2017) expressed that the practice of educating all children in the same classroom, including children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities is referred to as inclusion. The inclusive classes often require a special assistant to the classroom teacher. In inclusive classrooms, all children follow the same schedules; everyone is involved in the same

field trips, extracurricular activities, and assemblies. A well-informed approach and positive perception toward inclusion begins with complete comprehension of inclusion and the reasons for implementing the policy of placing students with disabilities in the mainstream. Walsh (2013) stated, “Inclusion is important because through our diversity we certainly add to our creativity” (p. 2). The difficulties and complexities of implementing the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms where they would be with their non-disabled peers tend to be overwhelming even for most of the experienced general education teachers. Stout (2001) expressed that the term inclusion stipulates a “commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend”. It means bringing the support services to the child and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class. The proponents of inclusion generally favor newer forms of education service delivery (p. 1).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, does not require mandatory implementation of inclusion in schools. The law requires that children with disabilities be educated in the “least restrictive environment appropriate” to meet their “unique needs.” However, IDEA envisaged that the “least restrictive environment” analysis would begin with placement of the students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. IDEA distinguishes that it is not appropriate to place all children with disabilities in the regular education classroom, rather the law requires school districts to have a “continuum of placements” available, extending from the regular education classroom to residential settings, in order to accommodate the needs of all children with disabilities. Using the continuum concept makes it more likely that each child would be placed appropriately in an environment that is specifically suited to meet his or her needs. Inclusion as a program does not literally place

students with disabilities in general education classes, it involves much more than that. It involves a process to ensure that there are essential changes in the way a school community supports and addresses the individual needs of each child.

As a result, actual and effective models of inclusive education go a long way to not only benefit students with disabilities, but also create an environment in which every student, including those who do not have disabilities, has the opportunity to flourish (Inclusive School Network, 2015). Inclusion, therefore, as a model for instruction of students with special needs has triggered changes in attitudes toward and perceptions of students with disabilities. Inclusion is a positive step in the integration of students with special needs into the general environment (Stainback, 2000). Special education should be seen as it is designed, as a service not a place because it will reduce labeling and special classes, but not essential supports and services (Stainback, 2000). In the past, students with disabilities were segregated, but the today's movement towards placing these disabled students in regular classes means that the teachers in inclusion must learn to include these students in planning classroom instruction. The teachers can do this by differentiating instruction to enable the students with disabilities participate in the curriculum and increase their academic performance.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was developed from the works of Makinen (2013) and Gao and Mager (2011). This study is to examine special education and general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education inclusion classroom. Collaborative learning, professional learning communities, and teacher efficacy all have foundations based on the theories of Bandura and Lewin. Lewin's social interdependence theory originated with his belief that behavior was subject to two sets of

influences: internal (the person) and external (the situation). Through his research and theories, he set out to prove that the situation has a more powerful influence than we tend to believe, and what matters is how the person perceives the situation (Mook, 2004). Lewin's research was directed at solving social problems, and his interest grew around the idea of tensions between the perception of self and one's environment. Lewin taught his students the dynamics behind his social interdependence theory. Deutsch, one of his students, built on Lewin's research and conceptualized that there were two types of social interdependence: positive and negative (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The Johnson brothers continue to use Lewin's and Deutsch's influences in incorporating cooperative learning through social interdependence theory into our modern-day classrooms. The literature examining the link between teachers' attitude, the instructional practices implemented and teachers' efficacy toward adapting instruction for effective inclusion were reviewed.

Bandura (1993) believed that cooperative learning structures in which students work together and help one another tend to promote more positive self-evaluations of capability and higher academic attainments than do individualistic or competitive ones. His social learning theory promotes learning through imitation. Through the well-known Bobo doll experiments, Bandura proved that we tend to imitate behavior that we observe. However, Bandura ascertains four related processes that must be put in action in order for this imitation to ultimately occur (Mook, 2004). The first, attentional processes, refers to the premise that the imitator is actually aware that an action has taken place. The second, retention processes, refers to the knowledge that not only the behavior must be remembered, but also the consequences of the action. The third, skill processes, explains that the imitator must have the necessary skills to replicate the

action. The final process, reinforcement, requires the imitator to sense a reward of some type in order to desire replication of the action (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

The degree to which general education teachers are capable of adapting and differentiating the general education curriculum to accommodate the students with disabilities are vital important factor for their increased academic performance. Some studies have shown that the beliefs and attitudes of the general education teachers shape the instructional practices they use and ultimately affect the academic achievement of the students with disabilities (Holzberger et al., 2013). The researchers underscore the importance of teachers' attitudes and their efficacy in modifying instructional practices in inclusion, important rudiments of greater students' performances.

Some of the related studies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Yoon-Suk & David, 2011; Pearson, Clavenna-Deane & Carter, 2015) underscore the importance of resources and support provided to the general education teachers in inclusion classes. The authors reported that the availability of support services (e.g., specific teaching methods and learning materials for students with different kind of disabilities) for teachers in their classrooms and schools were consistently associated with positive teacher's attitudes toward inclusion.

A number of studies have been identified that show teachers' attitudes toward inclusion may be influenced by a number of variables such as teachers' self - efficacy, years in teaching, grade level and subject area taught, experience teaching students with special needs, and training in special education strategies (Cassidy, 2011). Self - efficacy is the level of confidence one has at task completion (Schaefer, 2010). It is also, "the extent to which a teacher believes that he/ she can affect student performance" (Ryan, 2007, p. 12). He highlights that teacher self-efficacy has a direct relationship with student achievement and motivation. Teachers who demonstrate

higher resilience in obstacles, show lower levels of stress and depression in demanding situations and implement solutions for classroom difficulties tend to have higher self-efficacy with regard to their own teaching (Ryan, 2007). Teachers who showed higher levels of self-efficacy had higher levels of positive attitudes regarding classroom inclusion (Subban & Sharma, 2006). Kosko and Wilkins (2009) in their study found a positive relationship between professional development and teacher perception of the ability to adapt instruction for students with disabilities. To understand teacher attitudes toward inclusion and students with disabilities, it is important to examine positive and negative aspects of inclusion. The variables that influence the teachers' attitudes including efficacy, and collaboration in the classroom. These topics are addressed in this review.

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

According to Sailor and Burrello (2009) in a congressional briefing on inclusive education asserts that "There is even a growing body of scientific evidence suggesting that integrated service models for students with disabilities (all disabilities) enhance educational outcomes for all students" (p.13). They also emphasized that collaborative instruction enhances academic and social outcomes for all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 states:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (p. 15)

The rational has transformed special education from isolation to inclusion and led to the revision of laws governing special education principles. Each revision of the laws has strengthened the notion that educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom is the best option (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). The percentage of students with disabilities who spent most of the school day (80 % or more of their time) in general classes in regular schools increased from 33 % in 1990– 91 to 62 % in 2013–14 (Chattman 2017). Inclusion is not a place; it is a mindset (Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015). It is a belief that students with disabilities should be celebrated and given the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers. The school leader infuses this mindset in the teachers and staff, and it becomes a cornerstone of the school's culture.

Inclusion does not mean that all students with disabilities will be educated in general education classrooms all day unless that is what is appropriate for all the students at the school. Schools are always responsible to provide the full continuum of services based on students' needs, so closing resource rooms or other support services and mandating that every child be placed in general education classrooms is just as unethical and ineffective as removing all special education students from general education classrooms. Student needs must drive appropriate instructional and behavioral support and require an objective student-centered staffing with a mindset of "shared-ownership" for all students (Inclusive School Network, 2015).

The academic performance of the students with disabilities is highly influenced by the educational environment they experience, the teacher characteristics, and the nature of the classroom. The successful implementation of the inclusion program is a necessary ingredient of students with disabilities' success. O'Shea, Stoddard, and O'Shea (2000) underscored the importance of adequately equipping teachers with the skills that they would need to promote

collaborative efforts conducive to an effective inclusive classroom environment. This chapter, therefore, reviews the pros, cons, and mixed perceptions of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

**Teachers' Self-Efficacy/Experiences**

The teachers' self-efficacy is an important variable in determining attitudes towards the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Bandura (1977) asserted that self-efficacy positively affects individual behaviors. He described self-efficacy as individual's belief and courage to overcome a particular situation or a problem. Bandura also posited that teachers with a high sense of efficacy usually set challenging goals, maintain confident and motivated in face of demanding educational tasks, are abler to cope with stressors and negative feelings, and demonstrate greater willingness to choose tough environments (pp. 191-192). Self-efficacy beliefs provide the foundation of human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. Unless people believe that their actions can produce the outcomes they desire, they have little incentive to act or to persevere when they face obstacles (Erdem & Demirel, 2007).

According to Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012), self-efficacy in teaching is the belief that one's teaching can influence how well all students learn, including those who are unmotivated or demanding. Recent research findings validate the associations between high self-efficacy in teachers and openness to implement varied instructional strategies for students of all ability levels, including those with learning difficulties and more positive attitudes toward inclusive education (Weisel & Dror, 2006). It is therefore given that teachers who have a high level of teaching efficacy use more initiatives to meet learning needs of all students and set higher level of goals to be achieved by themselves and their students (Mergler & Tangen, 2010).

General education teachers with a greater level of teaching efficacy tend to perceive themselves as having positive attitudes towards the inclusion of the students with disabilities. They feel they are better able to provide learning opportunities that will meet the needs of these students.

A study by Urton, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2014) provided evidence of the positive influence of sense of self-efficacy and personal experience regarding attitudes towards inclusion for children with special educational needs (SEN) teacher self-efficacy significantly influenced the attitudes toward social integration. Teachers' self-efficacy has not only been identified as a stable and vital indicator of teacher motivation, but also as a predictor of teacher receptivity to innovative strategies, and both factors relate to student motivation and student success (Bandura & Hardre, 2003). Bandura says self-efficacy encourages motivation. The more self-belief one has, the more motivated they will be to succeed. Teachers who had substantial experience with teaching children with disabilities had more positive attitudes towards inclusion than their colleagues with less experience (Makinen, 2013). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Avramidis et al, (2000) concluded that teachers with training in special needs education themselves are confident enough to include students with disabilities in their classroom and appeared to hold more positive attitudes towards inclusive education in general.

Attitudes also influence the type of information we attend to and retrieve from memory, and hence the way we interpret the different things we encounter in the world (Maio & Haddock, 2010). Therefore, the way teachers react to inclusion is, to a great extent, influenced by the knowledge and experience they have about SEN students and inclusion. Research suggests that teachers, who possess sufficient and accurate knowledge about inclusion, have more positive attitudes toward it (Al Zyoudi, Al Sartwai & Dodin, 2011; Hakim, 2009).

The results of the studies investigating influences of a specific education training background on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion demonstrated that, level of training is an important factor in the formation of more positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion and newly qualified teachers may realize that they are not adequately prepared which may increase attrition rates among teachers (Makinen, 2013). The concept of self-efficacy has been applied to research in a wide variety of areas in order to assess predicted performance on specific tasks. In the educational and psychological fields, teacher self-efficacy relates to the teacher's appraisal of his/her abilities to instruct a diverse student population (Holzbergeret et al., 2013).

Teachers' self-efficacy is a crucial variable to study because it has important implications for the success of inclusion. Staff development and teacher preparation programs opportunities enable teachers to grow as professionals, develop innovative forms of teaching and learning that can address students from diverse backgrounds, including learners with academically and economically disadvantaged learners and most importantly develop their self-efficacy. Sanger and Osguthorpe (2011) found that teacher preparation programs have a largely unrealized potential to contribute to improving teachers' capacity to implement inclusive education. Teachers in inclusive schools need specific workshops that will make them become more used to working with children with disabilities in their classroom. Gao and Mager (2011) expressed that teachers' sense of efficacy and attitudes toward school diversity developed over time, though, vacillation might occur at certain points of the preparation. Educating children with behavioral disabilities equally challenges all teachers, whether they are confident in other diversity-relating areas or not. The faculty of the inclusive teacher education program may need to place a higher emphasis on this issue and to allocate more resources and time to better teachers' preparation in this regard, for example, adding more fieldwork on behavioral disabilities, (p.105). Students with

disabilities are more likely to experience success in the class when they are presented with activities that support their learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. The teacher's high self-efficacy makes it possible for the teacher to meet the students' individual needs in the classroom. The teacher will also adapt the instructional materials to the individual needs of the students and be able to provide any necessary modifications to accommodate these students.

**Teacher Collaboration and Inclusion**

The success of inclusion of the students with disabilities in the general education setting will depend greatly on effective collaboration of the teachers involved. There has to be a great deal of commitment and passion by the teachers to collaborate with each other. The result of their collaboration and partnership has the power to transform the culture of the school and elevate the performance of both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Friend and Cook (2013) defined collaboration with great specificity: "Interpersonal collaboration is a style of direct interaction between at least two equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 6). To undo this tragic exclusion of students and teachers alike, we must implement collaborative practices such as co-teaching and counteract the historic isolation of special education teachers (Pugach & Winn, 2011, p. 45).

Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom, (2015) expressed that school and teacher factors influence the quality and type of collaboration. Teachers' rate of improvement increases more rapidly if they work in a school with higher-quality collaboration than they would if they worked in a school with lower-quality collaboration. Teacher collaboration has strong and positive effects on student achievement, particularly when the collaboration is about assessment. Collaboration tends to be the glue that will bind the special and general education teachers together into a common goal of implementing inclusion model. There has to be a complete and

thoughtful commitment between the general and special education teachers involved in inclusion for collaboration to be successful. Recent research on inclusion and collaboration indicates that certain conditions must be in place to yield successful collaboration. Deppeler (2012) research states, "genuine collaboration is based on common goals, voluntary engagement and parity among the participants and involve shared resources, decision-making, responsibility, and accountability for outcomes" (Friend & Cook, 2013).

The diversity of the students, which includes those with disabilities in the classroom, creates numerous challenges for teachers who may not have known the same diversity themselves as students. Among these, teachers must balance the requirements of high-stakes accountability while meeting the needs of diverse students within their classroom. Team partnership and collaboration are important pieces for achieving success and meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Collaboration is not just among the teachers but involves all the stakeholders in the school, the parents, staff and school leadership. The results of study by Urton, Wilbert and Hennemann (2014) support the assumption that principals have a strong influence on the teaching staff's attitudes and experience of collective efficacy. Price (2012) also expressed that the school leadership may also influence the overall school atmosphere in a positive way to encourage positive attitude towards collaboration. Collaboration is a process through which a team will constructively explore their ideas to search for a solution that will increase their performance as well as meets its organizational goals and objectives. A true collaboration is more than just an activity, but a process that combines all the efforts of the all members of that team.

Friend and Pope (2005) define inclusion as a belief system,

> It is the understanding that all students-those who are academically gifted, those who are average learners, and those who struggle to learn for any reason-should be fully welcomed members of their school communities and that all professionals in a school share responsibility for their learning. (p. 57)

The collaborative partnership of the teachers will enable the students with disabilities participate in education that meets their individual needs. The indicators of a special educator with strong collaboration skills include:

> a) modeling strategies for consultation and collaboration, b) building respectful and positive relationships with professionals, c) coordinating the inclusion of students with disabilities into a variety of school settings, and d) using co-teaching methods to increase student achievement in the classroom. (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 78)

Collaboration, though often represented as synonymous with co-teaching, rather includes co-teaching as one subset of skills needed to educate students with disabilities in twenty-first century schools (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 77).

Ashkenas (2012) described collaboration as when individual goals are subordinated for collective achievement. A key ingredient to successful inclusion is a strong partnership between the teachers, school leadership, and parental involvement. Strong partnerships are critical to ensuring children receive adequate and appropriate supports and services in their early childhood programs. Many communities believe in the importance of collaboration but have made little progress due to limited planning times or lack of commitment and support from school leaders. Fostering relationships between providers requires an on-going commitment. Equally important is a commitment across providers to build strong partnerships with families, children's first and most important teachers and advocates. Schmuck, Bell, and Bell (2012) encouraged the use of

the survey data to strengthen teachers' trust and functioning as well as breakdown the barriers among staff members so that they would become more open to effective collaboration in their classrooms and nurture a better school culture where the goal is to increase the academic performance of the students.

Collaboration requires commitment on the part of each individual to a shared goal, demands careful attention to communication skills, and obliges participants to maintain parity throughout their interactions. Morgan (2016) asserted that one of the benefits of inclusion is the integrated services, which means the cohesive delivery of instructional services inside and outside the classroom. He discussed the benefits of collaboration as,

> Having scheduled meetings with the Special Educator and the support staff who are serving the students to discuss students, their progress, and plan of attack. Sometimes I feel there is a disconnect between services given outside the classroom and what is happening inside the classroom. (p.43)

Collaboration brings people, ideas and proven strategies together for the accomplishment of the organization's vision and mission. Strauss (2013) in underscoring the importance of collaboration in the school, observed that the weight of accumulating evidences in favor of collaboration suggest that it is time to reverse course from the unproductive reliance on coercive "sticks" that have dominated teaching pedagogy to a new set of approaches that would promote effective teamwork and intensively collaborative practices. The complexity of achieving enhancing the students with disabilities academic performances in the classrooms have increased the tendency for collaboration in solving compounded problems, and creating opportunities for their academic growth. Inclusion of the students with disabilities in the general education classes are now so convoluted and more complex for one teacher to understand. Managing

interdependence requires that the teachers will need to work cooperatively and in conjunction with others who have relevant and complimentary knowledge or skills to bring to bear on a particular problem, usually one in which the participants have a shared interest. The teachers involved in inclusion must continue to find ways to enable it if they want to leverage the ideas and creativity of many to address complex learning issues (Coastwise Consulting, 2012).

The school leaders and stakeholder must realize that teachers are inspired to collaborate when they are part of something that has meaning, when they feel safe, and when they are valued as contributors (Goman, 2014). Teacher collaboration requires leaders who are able to cultivate the capacity to collaborate about instruction, curriculum, students, and assessments, create and support instructional teams to maintain engagement in high-quality collaboration, and serve as an advocate of teacher collaboration (Learning Forward, 2011). A school organization can increase collaboration by building trust, being consistent with providing resources and being supportive. Collaboration fosters a work culture that makes it possible for teamwork to increase engagement and innovation. Teacher collaboration, when practiced with a focus on instructional strategies, curriculum, and assessment particularly, has benefits for both teachers and students. The results are even more promising when the collaboration is extensive and perceived by teachers as helpful (Learning Forward, 2011).

**Positive Aspects of Inclusion**

Inclusion, co-teaching, and collaboration are innovations to be implemented by school districts to make inclusion of the special education students in the general education classes probable. Schools are under increasing pressure to improve the educational experience of all students. One of the qualities of inclusion is the positive belief of teachers that teaching students with disabilities influences their perceptions of success in inclusive classrooms. As such, the

effective implementation of inclusive programs requires that special and general education teachers be familiar with the characteristics of children with disabilities, the IEP, important laws, and strategies for assessing and teaching instructions to individual students' needs. These special and general education teachers also need strategies for evaluating student learning and for responding to inappropriate student behavior (Moffett, 2000).

The attitudes of teachers are greatly related to the success of all the students, including the ones with disabilities. The academic performances of the students with disabilities are largely dependent on these teachers' perceptions (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Some research studies have suggested that teachers' perceptions may be influenced by many ways and reasons. Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) found that teachers' attitudes are strongly affected by the following factors: the types and severity of the student's disability, teachers' knowledge and training, availability of physical and human resources, as well as government policy.

Educational researchers have found a positive correlation between teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and students' positive social and academic achievement in the classroom. Attitudes can be defined as learned beliefs that develop over time and how well the teachers implement the inclusive programs again depends on their attitudes towards inclusion. The inclusive special and general education teachers have to believe that all children can be educated, children with disabilities can be educated in regular classrooms, and inclusion is a beneficial program if they are expected to accept working with the students. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are often based on practical concerns about how inclusive education can be implemented, rather than be grounded in any particular ideology (Burke and Sutherland, 2004).

The best practice dictates that up to one-third of the class may be students with disabilities since higher ratios approximate a special education classroom. The students' need for

support in that content area is increased by the addition of the students with disabilities. The class should mirror what a typical general education classroom would look like. The ability to comprehend the severity of the disability of these students by the teachers such as understanding the need for accommodation within their classroom affects the attitude of the teachers towards inclusion. That is, the more severe the child's disability, the less positive their attitude is towards inclusion (Forlin and Chambers, 2011). The type of disability also appears to influence teachers' attitudes. For example, teachers were found to be more supportive of including children with physical and sensory disabilities than those with intellectual, learning, and behavioral disabilities. Accordingly, they favored the abolishment of the cascade model (Stainback, 2000). The cascade model is seen when they have full- and part-time special classes at a school other than the student's home school or neighborhood school. Full inclusionists argued that the general education classroom environment more accurately reflects society and provides a supportive, humane atmosphere for all students (Goessling, 2000).

According to Cook, Tankersley, Cook, and Landrum (2000), teachers' attitude appears to reflect on their own interaction with parents, as well as the influence of parents on student's behavior, when considering students' impact on themselves and their classrooms. The parents' acquisition of effective skills of raising the children with disabilities and communicating with school professionals are likely to engender improved teacher attitudes toward the parents, and consequently, towards their children. Cook et al; (2000) also recommended that teachers proactively facilitate meaningful communication with parents of students with disabilities. In this way, the teachers are more likely to understand parents and less apt to allow misperceptions of parents to worsen their attitudes toward and interaction with their students with disabilities.

The stakeholders' complete collaboration is an important factor behind a successful inclusion. This is particularly important in increasing the positive attitudes of special education and general education teachers towards inclusion. According to Voltz, Brazil, and Ford (2001), it is important for special education and general education teachers to collaborate on issues, concerns, and appropriate instruction and structure in the classroom for students with disabilities. Voltz, et al. also pointed out that the entire school staff should collaborate and work together to meet the needs of all students, thereby underscoring an important part of inclusion. The entire school staff would share the responsibility in meeting and supporting the needs of all students regardless of disability or no disability. The result would be that the special education teachers would not solely work with students with disabilities and the general education teachers would not solely work with students without disabilities, but collaborate to increase the chances of success of all students in the general education classroom.

In an elaborate review and analysis of classroom teachers' perceptions and attitudes about teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) expressed that some students with disabilities particularly those with learning disability obtained better achievement results in full inclusion classroom, but others fared better when part-time resource support was provided. These students, according to them, made significant gains when they were provided with high-quality pullout instructions, and their gains were significantly greater compared to their peers educated in inclusive classrooms as well. They argued that the intensive instruction provided in a small group pullout setting allows students with learning disability to receive the intensified instruction they need on specific concepts and skills. In addition, they stated that this type of instruction rarely occurs in general education classrooms. The study

echoed the views of previously cited researches that a combination of pullout support and full inclusion is required to provide services to the students with disabilities.

The benefit of inclusion extends to more than just the students and teachers in the school, the parents and guardians of students with disabilities in inclusion receive direct benefits from this movement. According to Kochhar, West, and Taymans (2000), parents and guardians receive more support from inclusion because there is more interaction with school staff and other parents of students with disabilities. The support network generated by the inclusion process increases the knowledge that parents have about community resources and agencies that can assist them. The inclusion also creates suitable collaborative environment that creates and nurtures parental empowerment that enables and strengthens personal decision-making, goal setting, and self-advocacy for their children. The newly formed relationship, according to the above authors, helps to decrease dropout rates among this population by creating appropriate school-to-work programs, intense support, and partnerships between businesses in the community and the school. These programs allow the student to focus on particular job interests and skills they have, while helping them get the necessary training, so they automatically have skills for work when they are finished. It is imperative for schoolteachers to have positive perception of the students with disabilities in their general education classroom to make these benefits plausible.

**Negative Aspects of Inclusion**

In a study on the Inclusion of pupils with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) in the mainstream schools that addressed the affordances and constraints which may affect the inclusion of those pupils due to their unique characteristics. Mohamed (2014) observed that teachers are likely to rely on verbal as well as non-verbal communication in interacting with all

pupils. The presence of the participants in class, however, places restrictions on the teachers' conscious and unconscious use of body and face signals because the teachers have not been adequately prepared. The teachers were inclined to draw comparisons between the participants and their peers. According to Shevlin, Winter, and Flynn (2013), most teachers have difficulties communicating with ASD students and these has affected their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with ASD in the regular education setting. They have however, suggested that the first and most critical element of developing strategies to support communication in a student with ASD is teacher knowledge.

Teachers must begin with an awareness of the student's communication abilities. It may be helpful to remember that every behavior is an attempt at communication. If the student has no functional language or is nonverbal, it is imperative that teachers use nonverbal communication Flynn also expressed that due to the tremendous diversity among students with ASD, there is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy. The attitudes of the teacher and paraprofessional can determine the success — or failure — of the student with ASD in the general education classroom. Teachers, who provide appropriate environments, employ proven behavior-management strategies, and welcome students with reasonable but challenging expectations will see that students with ASD can make great gains in socialization, communication, and academic achievement.

Inclusion may not be the best educational plan for all the students with disabilities. Some studies have found that young students who do not have disabilities experience negative influences when they are placed in the same setting with students with emotional or behavioral disorder. For example, Fletcher (2010) found in a study on the effects of inclusion of students with emotional disability in a regular classroom show that when a student with emotional disability is placed in a regular classroom, the regular student's test scores will be negatively

affected. This shows that students in full-inclusion classrooms are affected more than partial inclusion. The effects themselves are not large, but Fletcher hypothesized that the aggregate effects may be substantial because nearly 10 percent of students in the sample had a classmate with an emotional or behavioral disability. Gottfried (2014), in his study also showed that young students with a greater number of classmates with educational disabilities have higher numbers of problem behaviors and worse social skills.

The effects are largest for students who have classmates with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The negative effects were less pronounced for students with high academic abilities, and for those in classes taught by an experienced teacher. Another study by Gottfried, et al (2016) expressed that students who had a classmate with an emotional or behavioral disability missed approximately half a day more of school than students who did not have such a classmate. The odds that a student was chronically absent were 1.42 times greater for students who had a classmate with an emotional or behavioral disability. Other researchers have emphasized that the impacts of the new studies were small, and because there are different types of conflicting behaviors in the early child growth and development, it is hard to decipher the exact cause of the negative effect. Mahone (2011) suggested that it is rare for young children to be diagnosed with an emotional or behavioral disorder, which suggests these children's behavior might have been unusually severe to be picked up in this research.

Yoon-Suk and David (2011) conducted their study on general education teachers in charge of mainstream classrooms that included one student with disabilities. In the setting, the students with disabilities typically spent up to two hours a day studying with special education teachers in resource rooms outside the mainstream classroom. The rest of the time, they were in the mainstream classroom.  They found that the severity of disability and availability of

resources consistently influenced teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, regardless of differences in nationality or culture. The results show that 41.37% of general education teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion programs, while 55.16% were unwilling to participate. The majority of teachers (75.85%) felt that students with disabilities would receive a better education in a special education classroom. Most of the teachers still maintain their old traditional teaching methods that can only accommodate the regular education students. To these teachers, resistance to the new inclusive education is the norm. As the adage goes, old habits die hard. In this context, old attitudes may also lead to discrimination and prejudice that negatively affect the students with disabilities academic performances.

Murphy (2015) asserted that in some districts, students with physical disabilities are expected to attend schools that are inaccessible to them. In economically deprived school systems, especially those in rural areas, dilapidated and poorly cared for buildings can restrict accessibility. Some of these facilities are not safe or healthy for any students. Many schools do not have the facilities to accommodate students with special needs, and local governments lack either the funds or the resolve to provide financial help. Environmental barriers can include doors, passageways, stairs and ramps, and recreational areas. These can create a barrier for some students to enter the school building or classroom. Many policy makers do not understand or believe in inclusive education, and these leaders can stall efforts to make school policies more inclusive. This can exclude whole groups of learners from the mainstream educational system, thereby preventing them from enjoying the same opportunities for education and employment afforded to traditional students.

In a study by Pearson, Clavenna-Deane and Carter (2015), it was noted that inclusion as a service delivery model presents a significant challenge to educators due to the extensive

planning, modifying, and organizing of services as well as the daily problem solving and increased professional development required to facilitate the service in the general education environment. The study also displayed that teachers whose students were included in general education were more likely to display positive overall attitudes related to their jobs. Teachers in suburban and rural areas with full inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes display positive attitudes toward the inclusion process. The students in these areas are generally more accepting because there is low teacher to student ratio in the classes. The students have already developed a relationship with the each other prior to entering the school. It is difficult to form classroom relationships for the students with different backgrounds in an urban setting, making it hard for inclusion to be effective in these classes. For inclusion implementation to be effective therefore, more time and a change of teachers and students' attitude is needed complete enactment of the program.

Teaching disabled students presents some unique and distinctive challenges. Not only will these students demand more of your time and patience; so, too, will they require specialized instructional strategies in a structured environment that supports and enhances their learning potential (Fredericks, 2005). The additional time required to teach students with disabilities combined with the mandatory standardized testing emphasizing students' achievement to comply with provisions of NCLB, have placed additional stress on the teachers. The provision that requires local education agencies to show evidence of academic improvement of students with disabilities in an educational setting (otherwise known as the accountability provision) has provided additional pressure on the implementation of full inclusion. NCLB also emphasized the goal of improving academic achievement and functional performance within a child's IEP. The act equally ensures that states must make it possible for students with disabilities to participate

with or without accommodations in state-sponsored assessments that are universally designed and have a process in place to measure their performance (NCLB, 2001).

Inclusion, as defined by Gal, Schreur, and Engel-Yeger (2010), is a philosophy of acceptance and belonging to the community so that a class is structured to meet the needs of all of its students (p. 89). Yet, creating an environment accepting of inclusion can be met with resistance and attitudinal barriers (p. 91). The students with disabilities have right to be educated in the mainstream with their peers and it is important to understand the teachers' attitude toward the inclusion. Gerber (2011), in explaining the difficulties with inclusion for a classroom teacher, asserted that a classroom teacher is expected to select educational methodology to best suit each student. This is a challenging goal for one teacher who potentially has more than 30 students in each of five to seven classes. Most students can be grouped with other students whose educational needs are similar. This may reduce the planning required to two or three groups. If you add special needs students who have severe learning delays, developmental issues, or who speak little or no English, this task can feel almost insurmountable – especially if the inclusive classroom does not include a co-teacher.

In the study by Mackey (2014), the data revealed that all participants had little pre-service preparation specific to working with students with disabilities and varying levels of in-class supports, but all had positive attitudes about having students with disabilities in their general education classrooms. However, the teachers in this study also felt that their undergraduate programs had not adequately prepared them to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classroom. The math teacher and the social studies teacher in the study had earned a master's degree in English Language Learner (ELL) education. Both credited their master's program for better preparing by equipping them with specific strategies to meet the

needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Teachers who are not trained or who are unwilling or unenthusiastic about working with differently abled students are a drawback to successful inclusion. Training often falls short of real effectiveness, and instructors already straining under large workloads may resent the added duties of coming up with different approaches for the same lessons. The need for teachers who have both the knowledge and the ability to teach special education students is more important these days because the new push to include more of the special education students into the general education classes. There is need for teacher-education programs in the colleges to fill the void created by the lack of qualified general and special education teachers in inclusion classes.

Fuchs (2010) in his study, *examining teachers' perceived barriers associated with inclusion,* expressed that teachers felt that they lacked adequate planning and collaboration time. Specifically, teachers discussed the lack of planning and collaboration time, as well as a lack of instructional time to cover all the additional requirements in the curriculum. One teacher in the study, who had 19 years of experience, expressed her frustration with the unrealistic expectations for their allotted instructional time. She said, "Through the years, we have to now teach computers, character ed., and manners. The lower ones (students) are so needy. It is hard. It is tough. Never enough time…" Another teacher with six years of teaching experience said he felt like providing the extra accommodations in the classroom was "time-consuming." A sixth grade teacher with 9 years of experience, reported that trying to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general classroom setting "eats up your time." She felt that there was not adequate time to plan and teach. One teacher reiterated the same sentiment of the other teachers by saying, "More time, less kids."

Cole, Waldron, and Majd (2004) examined the effect of inclusive education on children with learning disabilities and children with mild mental disabilities. In their study, they compared inclusive and non-inclusive primary school classes in Indiana (US). In inclusive classes, children with disabilities had reading and mathematics lessons in the general education classrooms. In non-inclusive classes, children with disabilities had these lessons in separate classes. Achievement was measured with a test of reading and mathematics. Data on 429 students with mild disabilities were analyzed. Of these, 235 students were being taught in special classes and 194 students in inclusive classes. The analysis showed no differences between the children in inclusive and non-inclusive classes. The study also showed that there is significant difference in the performances of the two groups examined in the study. This may pose an important difficulty for those pushing for inclusive classes for the children with disabilities.

Watnick and Sacks (2006) discovered that some high school teachers viewed full inclusion with mixed opinions. The teachers' concerns were the "thoughtful identification" of the participating students in inclusive classes. These teachers believed that certain exceptionalities, such as students identified, as emotionally handicapped, need smaller class sizes and teachers with specialized training. There was also emphasis on encouraging student, teacher, administrator, and community collaboration in order to achieve a successful inclusion program. The researchers also recommended that district, school, and university leaders must heed the information gathered from teachers who have included special needs students in their general education classrooms, from special education teachers who have co-taught or consulted, and from studies on attitudes and school reform. These educational leaders should build a portfolio of best practices for use by all the stakeholders engaged in the inclusive process to ensure that everyone is working from the same page. The need for collaborative instructional teams to be

formed in the encompass all the teachers involve in the inclusion of the students with disabilities should be encouraged and supported by administration.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

Overall, the research that focuses on general and special education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities contained more studies utilizing self-reporting data such as surveys, interviews, and questionnaires than observational data. In a study on inclusive education in middle school general education teachers' approaches, Mackey (2014) utilized pre-observation and post-observation semi-structured interviews to conduct the study. The observational notes were transcribed for both the pre-observation and post-observation interviews. In such a study, where a combination of pre-observation and post-observation is required, rigor is difficult to maintain, assess, and demonstrate (Anderson, 2010). Most of the studies reviewed utilized the qualitative methods.

Mohamed (2014) also used interviews and observations of the teachers and assistant teachers in his study. In the study of the attitudes towards inclusion, Yoon-Suk and David (2011) used both teacher questionnaire and interviews for data collection methods. The questionnaire was adapted from the Inclusion Questionnaire for Educators (Salend, 1999). Morgan (2016) in the study on reshaping the role of a special educator into a collaborative learning specialist, utilized interviews, faculty surveys, student surveys, and personal journal reflections to collect information for the study.

Although qualitative research is best suited to the topic of interest in the present study and can provide in-depth information from participants, qualitative research has some limitations that must be mentioned. According to Anderson (2010), the research quality of the study is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the

researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Its findings can be more difficult and time consuming to characterize in a visual way. In the study by Yoon-Suk and David (2011), data collection methods included a teacher questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from the Inclusion Questionnaire for Educators (Salend, 1999). It provided quantitative and qualitative data about teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in two parts. The data collection took longer time and the interpretation of the data also took longer time. Finally, the data is only collected in a few cases that makes difficult to generalize the result of the study. In the study, Royster, Reglin, and Losike-Sedimo (2014) utilized only 19 teachers who taught the core subjects. As a research endeavor, the case study contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena. Not surprisingly, the case study has been a common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, business, social work, and planning (Yin, 1983). In this study, the case study approach allows for acquisition of data that is unique and practical to the school in the study.

**Synthesis of Research Findings**

A review of the research findings shows that although the movement for 'inclusive education' is part of a broad human rights agenda, many educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. "The number of students with disabilities including the ones with emotional and behavioral disabilities are being served in the general education setting have increased recently" (Niesyn, 2009, p. 227). The movement of these students to the general education setting has resulted in either a positive or negative attitudes of the teachers toward teaching in an inclusive setting. "The general education teachers are encountering more challenges in regards to providing differentiating instructions, managing disruptive behaviors and meeting the educational needs of the all the

students. The difficulty of inclusion is more distinct when the student with disability has emotional or behavioral challenges (Cassidy, 2011, p.4). A review of literature was carried out by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) on teachers' attitude studies in different countries from 1984 to 2000. The result showed the consistent influence of the nature of the students' disabilities in the teachers' attitude both across countries and across time of studies. Teachers' attitudes were less positive towards the inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral problems, and attitudes became less positive as the severity of the disability progressed. However, they tended to be willing to accommodate students with mild disabilities or physical/sensory impairments. These studies suggested that attitudes towards integration were strongly influenced by the nature of the disabilities and/or educational problems being presented and, to a lesser extent, by the professional background of the respondents. A more recent international review reported that the majority of teachers hold neutral or negative attitudes towards inclusive education (De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2011).

The data used by some of these studies were solely based on self-reporting instrument, classroom observations need to be conducted to validate these findings, as also suggested by Avramidis et al (2000), and De Boer et al. (2011). Besides, the substantial in-service teacher training should be developed in order to support the implementation of inclusive education. According to Avramidis and Kayla (2007), training should enable teachers to modify their practice in order to meet individual needs of the students with disabilities.

For this study, inclusion is defined as students with disabilities participating in classroom activities with their non-disabled peers. This means that all students in this study participated fully in the program and were included in all classroom activities. When all students are totally included in the classroom, many benefits are realized. One benefit for students with disabilities is

increased social skills and acceptance by typically developing peers (Odom & Diamond, 1998). At the same time, students without disabilities are more aware of differences between people and display more comfort around a person with a disability (Staub & Peck, 1994). For inclusion to be successful, several factors are important: (a) qualified personnel (Wesley, Buysse, & Tyndale, 1997), (b) available support services (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003, (c) adequate space and equipment to meet the needs of all children (Wolery et al., 1993), and (d) positive teacher attitude toward inclusion (Niemeyer & Proctor, 2002).

**Critique of Previous Research**

In a recent study that investigated collaboration between special and regular teachers in inclusive schools, regular teachers explicitly suggested that SEN students are the responsibility of special education teachers as they have better understanding of those students and their needs (Al-Natour et al., 2015). Such result seems to reflect rather the negative attitudes by general education teacher toward inclusion. Accordingly, research results that demonstrated teachers' attitudes could be attributed to insufficient or inaccurate knowledge that teachers have about SEN students or inclusion (Anati, 2012; Razali, et al., 2013; Shadreck, 2012). These studies do not take into considerations the ongoing staff or professional developmental training opportunities in the schools under study. In accordance with the call for highly qualifying teachers in the field, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) emphasized the need for high-quality continuing education, and education schools have paid attention to strengthening continuing education for teachers (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

There are only few studies that look at the other inherent challenges in many of the middle schools' settings such as the school structure and scheduling and the standardized testing, a necessary requirement for the acquisition of high school diploma, provides a big hurdle for

inclusion implementation. It affects the ability of general education teachers to effectively individualize instruction or to collaboratively problem-solve and deliver curriculum (Strodden, et al. 2003). The overall goal of the inclusion movement is to create classroom situations that will provide varied opportunities for students with disabilities to be successful. Tsang (2013) expressed that school pupils, with and without disabilities, generally do not object to studying together in the same classroom. They tend to reject those peers who exhibit disruptive behavior, regardless of whether they have disabilities or not because such behavior has detrimental effects on their social learning processes in the same classroom.

The conflicting views presented by the most studies have teachers confused as to how to perceive the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools. Some studies have the inclusion discourse that all children should be included, but there are some children who just would not cope in a mainstream setting. Inclusion, they suggested, is a good thing, but not such a good thing for special needs children with severe learning needs (Lawson, Parker, & Sikes, 2006). The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) on the other hand argues for the abolition of segregated (special) schooling and regards 'full inclusion' as a human right. Others argue that, within a rights-based framework, there is a need and a place for special school systems (Cigman, 2006). This differing ideas on inclusion affects the attitudes of the teachers towards the students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study presents one specific view on inclusion, which is that inclusion is a process. This process involves whole school re-organization in order to develop inclusive schools. Implicit in this process, however, is the eventual goal of full inclusion. Therefore, since the word inclusion is used in so many different ways, it is important, in order to avoid confusion, to be clear about what is meant by each specific use of the term (Hornby, 2011).

## Summary

The literature reviews underscored reasons for inclusion and the benefits of inclusion to the student with disabilities. The review covered the demands on teachers as well as students. Some of the literature reviewed identified how teachers are more receptive toward mainstreaming as opposed to inclusion and the positive or negative attitudes about inclusion. These studies investigated the skill level, support, and knowledge of the teachers. It is apparent, therefore, that there have been many varied perceptions held by teachers toward inclusion since its introduction. It appears that the most popular attitude held by teachers currently is that partial inclusion is positive for students. However, there is a need to provide a continuum of resources that sometimes may include restrictive settings for students. The most successful inclusion settings can be attributed to appropriate training, support, and collaboration for all school staff. Finally, there is still work to be done to ensure that school personnel realize all of the benefits of inclusion.

# Chapter 3: Research Methodology

## Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine special education and general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education inclusion classroom. This chapter is organized into eleven sections. These sections describe the research questions, the purpose and design of the study; research populations and sampling method; instrumentation; data collection; internal and external validity; limitations; delimitations; expected findings; ethical issues/considerations and summary.

## Research Questions

Based on the review of the literature, the following questions directed the research of this study. The major question for this study is how do general and special education teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the middle school setting.

1. What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities?
2. How do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate to meet the needs of students in their classes?

## Purpose and Design of the Study

In order to collect data to examine the attitudes of teachers in the four middle schools' inclusive classrooms under study, a case study approach was utilized. A case study is "an in-depth study of interactions of a single instance in an enclosed system" (Opie, 2005, p. 74). As in the case of this study, the focus of a case study is on a real situation with real people in an environment familiar to the researcher (Opie, 2005, p. 74). This case study utilized a

combination of survey questionnaire and open-ended interview questions to elicit the data and gained insights into the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in context of their practices.

This case study approach of survey for the teachers in inclusion and open-ended interview questions for selected teachers complement one another. The questionnaire or survey research method can be seen as over-reliant on instruments and, thus, disconnected from everyday life, with measurement processes creating a spurious or artificial sense of accuracy (Bryman, 2008). Interviews, on the other hand, provide contexts where participants can ask for clarification, elaborate on ideas, and explain perspectives in their own words, the interviewer can use questioning to lead or manipulate interviewee responses. The teachers were allowed to utilize enough time to express their views on the questions. Due to the interpersonal nature of the interview context, participants may be more likely to respond in ways they deem socially desirable (Yin, 2009). The use of the two methods in this case study provides a complete view of the attitudes of teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Mills, Durepos and Wiebel (2010) expressed that use of case studies in research creates knowledge and understanding particularly in education research. The use of the case study approach not only creates knowledge and understanding but also sets a standard for good teaching practices through two main means—development and implementation of the program. They also underscored the importance of using survey instruments in accomplishing that goal and opined that case study survey research is a research design in which a survey is administered to a case, either a small sample or an entire population of individuals, to describe an aspect or characteristic of that population.

Yin (2002) defines a case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context

are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used' (p.23). Case study research emphasizes the embeddedness of a phenomenon in its real-life context. In this study, examining the attitude of teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the classrooms. The information on the teachers' attitudes would not only be based on the survey, but also on qualitative open-ended interviews with the teachers in inclusion. The qualitative interviews will answer our second research question on teacher collaborations and administrative cooperation. This type of case study was the best fit for the research questions because it examined the attitudes of teachers in inclusion classes and how the teachers' experiences and collaboration in the classes affected their attitudes. The case study's use of survey and a follow-up open-ended interview questions provided a complete view of the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Case study approach captured the nuances of the population sampled with regard to their attitudes toward children with disabilities in the inclusive setting. Shank and Brown (2007) showed that the survey approach in the exploratory case study is prominent in studying what is known and restoring them. The findings utilizing survey tool may result in promulgating new laws and upending new facts that can withstand justification (p. 58). The survey approaches in a case study have clear objectives and guidelines that can be replicated in different environments that will produce the same results (Shank & Brown, 2007, p. 27).

A case study approach was best suited for this study because it allowed for in-depth examination of teachers' experiences and collaboration and their attitudes toward inclusion. According to Neill (2006), a case study design is an attempt to shed light on a phenomenon by studying in-depth a single case example of a phenomena. The case can be an individual person, an event, a group, or an institution. The use of case studies is suitable when we want to understand the interaction between a specific context and a phenomenon (Jacobsen, 2002). A

case study approach enabled us to examine the implementation of the inclusion of the students with disabilities and how the teachers' attitudes are affected by it. In other words, the data portrayed a complete picture of the situation. The case study draws from manifold lines of evidence for triangulating purposes and avails itself of "prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2002, pp. 13-14). According to Yin, therefore, a case study research should rest upon multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and benefit from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data analysis and collection. This case study is therefore, the best method because it enabled a combination of surveys and the follow-up interviews for the selected teachers.

A case study can be viewed as "an in-depth study of interactions of a single instance in an enclosed system" (Opie, 2005, p. 74). As in the case of this study, the focus of a case study is on a real situation with real people in an environment familiar to the researcher (Opie, 2005, p. 74). A case study must be methodically prepared and the collection of evidence must be systematically undertaken (Opie, 2005, p. 74). The interviews in a case study "highlight the role of human interaction and the importance of the social context in generating knowledge" (Kvale, 2001). They allow for deeper, more nuanced descriptions of participants' lives, and opportunities to clarify 27 misunderstandings experienced by the interviewee, than other methods of data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The open-ended question interviews that were used in this case study provided "more latitude of response than the structured interview" (Opie, 2005, p. 115).

Yin (2009) opined that one of the great strengths of a case study method as compared with other methods is that evidence can be collected from multiple sources. The richness of the

case study evidence base derives largely from this multi-facetted perspective yielded by using different sources of evidence. Robson (2002) stressed that importance of using of multiple sources of evidence collection of standardized information from a specific population in a case study. Case studies are commonly used in areas like psychology, sociology, political science, education, social work, business, and community planning (Yin, 2003). In these areas, case studies are conducted with objectives to increase knowledge about individuals, groups, and organizations, and about social, political, and related phenomena. It is therefore best suited to examine the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusion of the students with disabilities with the intention of increasing the educational performance of the students in inclusion classes in these settings. The study yielded a great deal of interesting insights into examining the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the middle schools under study.

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

A convenience sample of 98 general and special education teachers made up of the case study group committed to the inclusion model was gathered for this study. According to Dörnyei (2007), convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. The participants in this study are general and special education teachers in core inclusion classes—English, math, social studies, and science in middle schools in Mid-Atlantic public school district. The sample participating in the survey was divided into two groups of teachers: special education teachers—48 and the remaining 50—general education teachers.

In addition to the survey, in-depth open-ended interview questions of 10 English general and special education teachers were administered to capture the nuances of the classroom. Rubin and Rubin (2005) noted:

> Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion . . .in qualitative interviews each conversation is unique, as researcher's match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share. (p. 4)

The rationale for the selection of English teachers is that all students regardless of classification are required to take English class. The purpose of the follow-up interview questions was to gather more in-depth and thoughtful responses regarding the inclusion of special education students in the general education in the four selected middle schools in the district. The participants provided their demographic information in the first part of the questionnaire. A link to the web- based internet survey (Qualtrics) was sent to the subset of teachers.

**Instrumentation**

The two research questions that this study investigated were:

1. What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities?
2. How do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate to meet the needs of students in their classes?

To arrive at the answers to these questions, permission was granted by Suggs (2005) to use the Inclusion Survey. The questionnaire consists of 22 items. The first section gathered demographic information about the teacher such as the years they have been teaching, their gender, race/ethnicity, and level of expertise. The second section of the questionnaire uses a Likert scale, where respondents were asked to rank their responses to statements where 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*.

Personal interviews were used with open-ended discussion questions. Core English teachers in inclusion classes were selected for interviews. These interviews were comprised of questions dealing collaborations among teachers and administrators and how they affect their attitudes toward inclusion. Questions were taken from the literature reviewed in this inquiry and framed around the research questions posed for this inquiry. Open discussion concerning inclusion was also part of the interview process. These interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis by the researcher. The open-ended personal interviews comprised of a six-question interview of both the general and special education teachers in core classes in the four middle schools. Berg (2007) expressed that interviewing should be adopted as a tool for social research as it facilitates obtaining 'direct' explanations for human actions through a comprehensive speech interaction. A lower number of teachers will be selected than those completing the survey of both special and regular education to explore the complete understanding of the teachers' perceptions and attitudes of their inclusive classrooms. Copies of the questionnaire and the interview questions are included (see Appendixes B and C).

**Data Collection**

Morgan (2016) in assessing the role of special education teachers in collaborative classes, obtained data through interviews, faculty surveys, student surveys, and personal journal reflections. She studied the extent teachers' experiences relates to their attitudes. The researchers utilized a Likert scale survey to determine educator's attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. This data was then scrutinized to know the effects it has on professional development, university course work and experience of the teachers. Eighty-one respondents were drawn from the 12 primary schools and 4 secondary schools from urban, suburban and rural areas. This study was completed in two parts. The link to the survey questionnaires were sent to

the 48 general education and 50 special education teachers for a total of 98 teachers for the first inclusion survey, and 10 English teachers for open-ended interview questions. To ensure adequate privacy and confidentiality, the survey link was sent to the teachers involved directly. A cover letter (see Appendix D) was included to explain the purpose of the study, and the two-part survey.

The goal of the open-ended interview questions in the case study was to gather more in-depth and thoughtful responses regarding the inclusion of special education students in the general education curriculum. The interview approach in the collection of the data provided more information about the study as it relates to the participants. DeVaus (2014) expressed that qualitative data provides many data from real life people and situations and that it makes for greater comprehension of the human behavior. The personal interview questions provided the opportunity and freedom for the teachers to identify areas of needs for complete collaboration of the school stakeholders. The reason for using the open-ended unstructured interview questions was to gain a complete insight into what the teachers in inclusion considered relevant aspects of collaboration in the classrooms. Possible explanations or causes of the situation are not predefined and hence the course of the interview itself is left open. As a fellow teacher, it was very easy to establish trust because the respondents were willing to participate and give more information on collaboration and how they could improve on it to benefit the students with disabilities.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

According to Statistics Canada (2004), data analysis is the process of developing answers to questions through the examination and interpretation of data. Robson (2011) offered an important view on analysis and interpretation of data, when he posited that the process and

products of analysis provide the bases for interpretation and analysis. Data analysis in this case study was based on examining, categorizing and organizing evidence to evaluate whether the evidence supports or otherwise the initial propositions of the study. The analysis used the propositions that capture the nuances and objectives of the study. According to Rowley (2002), a case study researcher trawls through the evidence seeking corroboration or otherwise of the initial propositions, and then records relevant evidence and makes a judgement on whether the positions have been substantiated.

Thematic and coding analyses were used for the open-ended questions in the research. Thematic analysis is a foundation method for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Thematic analysis involves searching across a number of interviews, to find repeated patterns of meaning and writing them during the interview process not at the end (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 10). The writing should therefore begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes and continue right through the entire coding analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 11). The coding analysis process starts when the researcher begins to look for patterns of meaning and matters of potential interest in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 12). Coding is often used to refer to the first part of the analysis that concerns the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding is not just labeling, it is linking: "It leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize. When codes are applied and reapplied to qualitative data, you are codifying – a process that permits data to be "segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2007, p. 21). Coding is thus a method that enabled us to organize and group similarly

coded response from the teachers into categories that share common characteristics. The teachers in inclusion have both general and special education students in their classes and share similar experiences. It was therefore easy to code and place their responses on their experiences and collaborations into similar categories.

Data were collected from both the survey instruments and open-ended interview questions to only selected few teachers. Cresswell and Clark (2007) recognized that, in order to avoid losing potential value of some data, it might be preferable to adopt a secondary interview approach. The research focus can then be viewed from a number of vantage points, the approach known as triangulation (Banister et al., 2011). Collecting information from more than one source can extend and enhance the research process. Banister and colleagues suggested that more than one viewpoint, site, or source, increases diversity, thus leading to increased understanding of the research topic (Banister et al., 2011). This data analysis converged both types of data into a single set of results and interpretations, relating directly to the research questions.

**Limitations of the Research Design**

Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This study uses a survey questionnaire and follow up interview questions to elicit richer and more in-depth information about the difficulties and perceptions of the special and general education teachers in inclusive classes. The study may require replication in other school districts.

**Delimitations of the Research Design**

The primary delimitation of the study is that the survey questionnaire was administered to the general and special education teachers only in core subjects of English, math, social studies

and science in the middle schools in the district. Since every core subject is taught in English, the English teachers will be used for the follow-up questions. The study is also delimited because the sample in the study is purposefully selected and identified.

**Validation**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) postulated that trustworthiness is the best indicator that will be used to judge the quality of research. Trustworthiness as defined by Lincoln and Guba involves "credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability".

**Credibility.** Credibility establishes that the representation constructed through research is indeed valid and believable. Seale (2000) expressed credibility as follows:

> First, credibility should replace truth value. Through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation and triangulation exercises, as well as exposure of the research report to criticism by a disinterested peer reviewer and a search for negative instances that challenge emerging hypotheses and demand their reformulation, credibility is built up. (p.44)

Credibility is ensuring that a good moderator that will check personal bias and expectations at the door. This is achieved by learning as much candid information from the research participants as possible, and respectful neutrality is a must if the goal is valid qualitative research. It also ensures that the participants are truly members of the segment from which they are recruited. In this study the sample of study were accurate representation of the sample.

According to Brewer and Hunter (1989), the use of different methods in concert compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. The process of utilizing multiple methods, data sources, observers, or theories in order to gain more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied is called triangulation. It is used to make sure

that the research findings meet the requirements of credibility and transferability. Triangulation is the process of cross-checking theories and/or data utilizing various techniques (Patton, 2002). In this study, data were collected by utilizing the methods described previously such as survey questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. There were meticulous record keeping, demonstrating clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data were consistent and transparent (Long & Johnson, 2000). The context of this research is thoroughly described to enable transferability of the research. It is about whether some sort of similarity could be found in other research contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 294). This study also presented findings with "thick" descriptions of the phenomena to enable replication of the finding to other school districts.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to the stability and auditability of changes in the data over time, whereas confirmability is concerned with the objectivity of the data (Cope, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter (p.63]. In this study, it was achieved through the use of "overlapping methods", such as survey group and individual interview questions in this study. In order to address the dependability issue, the processes within this study was reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the research study and gain the same results. The two issues of dependability and confirmability are under one discussion because the supporting approaches overlap both concerns. Dependability dealt with the shared concepts by which the research is assessed, while confirmability determines the degree the findings can be replicated in qualitative study. Confirmability was further ensured by including participant quotes which represented themes in

the study (Cope, 2014). The quotes provided evidence that the study results were shaped by the participants and helped illustrate reasons for producing specific theme in the study.

**Expected Findings**

This result of this study is expected to reflect a similar study by Urton, Wilbert and Hennemann (2014) the expressed evidence of the positive influence of sense of self-efficacy and personal experience regarding attitudes towards inclusion for children with special educational needs teacher self-efficacy significantly influenced the attitudes towards social integration. The collaboration and partnership of special education and general education teachers is the best recipe for students with disabilities success in inclusion classes. Strong collaboration and collaborative cultures develop over time and require commitment to the process. Common planning time, professional learning communities, and critical friend's groups each require regular, dedicated time for teachers to collaborate. With time, teachers can develop authentic collaborative communities in which they address common issues, shared goals or school-wide initiatives; engage in mutually beneficial endeavors using communal resources; and advance their skills, knowledge, and dispositions related to student learning (Caskey and Carpenter, 2014).

**Ethical Issues and Considerations**

The importance of ethical issues and concerns in research cannot be over emphasized. CIRT (n. d.) expressed that the honesty, consistency and validity of the research findings rely heavily on devotion to moral principles. The integrity of the study should be assured that researchers followed the appropriate rules for issues such as human rights, animal welfare, and compliance with the law, conflicts of interest, safety, and health standards. One of the steps undertaken by this study to ensure the integrity of the study is the idea of informed consent. The

participants were made to understand they are taking part in the research and what is requires of them. The information to the general and special education teachers in the study included the purpose of the study, methods being used, and the possible outcome of the study as well as any possible risks to them. They were informed that the process is voluntary and taking part is optional. The other step is that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was protected. The teachers' identities were protected. The teachers were willing to volunteer information especially those that were private or sensitive in nature without fear of reproach from the administrators or the school district's office. The identities of the teachers were safeguarded by removing all personal identifiers from the data. It was also important to make the teachers aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study process at any stage.

**Summary**

The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs in general education middle school classrooms. The participants in this study were informed of the reason for the study (Appendix D). The data from the questionnaires portrayed the effects of the school administrator's support towards inclusion. Leadership is the cornerstone of any effective program change in a school and its support towards inclusion is imperative to the success of the program. The survey instruments and the open-ended interview questions provided an in-depth information of the attitudes of these teachers in the trenches of inclusive classrooms. Methods outlined were used to examine the teachers' attitudes and their effects on the education of students with disabilities.

# Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

## Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs in general education middle schools. It is a case study that utilized surveys and open-ended interview questions as means to gauge the attitudes of general education teachers and the factors that may influence their perceptions toward the inclusion of the students with disabilities in inclusion classes. The study focused on a convenience sample of 98 general and special education teachers evenly drawn from the core inclusion classes—English, math, social studies, and science in middle schools in Mid-Atlantic public school district. In addition to the survey questionnaires, in-depth follow-up interview questions of 10 English general and special education teachers were administered to capture the nuances of the classroom.

The two research questions investigated were: (a) What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities? (b) How do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate to meet the needs of students in their classes? Permission was obtained to use an *Inclusion Survey* designed by Suggs (2005). The qualitative survey questionnaire of 22 items were sent through Qualtric and through the school email system. The first section requested demographic information about the teacher participants. The teachers provided information about the years they have been teaching, their gender, race/ethnicity, and level of expertise. The second section of the questionnaire used a Likert scale, where respondents will be asked to rank their responses to statements where 1 = *strongly agree,* 2 = *agree,* 3 = *neutral,* 4 = *disagree,* and 5 = *strongly disagree*. Interview questions to the 10 special and general education teachers were also completed through the schools' email system. The information gathered from this research

project was presented in qualitative descriptive method as it pertains to each research question.

**Description of the Sample**

A total of 98 participants provided a complete set off responses to *Inclusion Survey*. The Survey included five background questions and 17 additional questions designed to gather information about their attitudes toward inclusion. Results are reported by question in aggregate and by group (i.e., special education and general education). There are 50 participants who indicated they currently teach general education classes. The other 48 indicated they currently teach special education classes. Most of the participants reported having 11 or more years of teaching experience. A large majority reported that they were female. There was roughly the same number of Black, Non-Hispanic and White, Non-Hispanic participants. More than half reported having "Adequate" special education expertise.

In addition to the qualitative survey questionnaires, open-ended interview questions were administered to a limited number of teachers. All the 10 English teachers that were randomly selected responded to the open-ended interview questions. Three teachers with less than five years' experience and seven teachers with five or more years of experience were randomly selected. The interview questions focused on general attitudes toward including students with disabilities, perception of administrators, and special education support. (See Appendix C)

**Summary of the Qualitative Survey Findings**

The descriptive statistics for each subscale are reported in Table 1. The findings as presented in Table 1 show the number of special education and general education teachers' response in the study, the mean, and standard deviation of each group's participation in the study. The response was based on their individual experiences in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

There were differences in response scales.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Subscales 1 and 2*

| Subscale | N | Mean | Stand. Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 98 | 3.10 | 0.38 |
| 2 | 98 | 3.04 | 0.30 |

**Presentation of the Qualitative Descriptive Data and Results**

Survey items were divided into two subscales. Subscale 1 addresses teachers' experiences teaching students with disabilities: What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities? Subscale 2 addresses teachers' attitudes toward peer collaboration: To what extent do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate to meet the needs of students in their classes?

Subscale averages and standard deviations are reported in Table 4 for general and special education groups. Attitudes toward inclusion are measured on a 1 to 5 scale (Appendix B). Higher averages on Subscale 1 indicate more experienced teachers. Higher averages on Subscale 2 indicate higher perceived peer collaboration. General education teachers had a slightly higher average on Subscale 1 than special education teachers. Special education teachers had a slightly higher average on Subscale 2 than general education teachers.

Table 2

*Subscale Scores by Group*

| | | Subscale 1 | | Subscale 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| General Education | 50 | 3.24 | 0.374 | 2.95 | .323 |
| Special Education | 48 | 3.06 | 0.306 | 3.02 | .302 |

*Note*. Use caution when making conclusions about Subscale 2, given the differences in response scales.

*Items were generally measured on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree.

**Item-Level Results**

*Q1: My lack of expertise in the area of special education limits my ability to teach students with special needs effectively.*

Over half of the respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that their lack of expertise in the area of special education limits their ability to teach students with special needs effectively. When these responses are disaggregated by group, we see that some of General Education teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Majority of the Special Education teachers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.

This is in line with Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008), who conducted research among educators in the Southeastern U.S. regarding their attitudes toward inclusion. They found that despite the fact that almost all teachers interviewed were willing to make necessary

accommodations for students with disabilities, the majority of those teachers felt that students with disabilities should not be educated in general classrooms no matter what the simplicity or severity of their disability. The teachers believed that they do not have the administrative support and not enough training to adapt the curriculum to the special education students' needs.

Table 3

*"My lack of Expertise in the area of Special Education limits my ability to teach students with special needs effectively."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 7 | 7% |
| Agree | 16 | 16% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 17 | 18% |
| Disagree | 38 | 39% |
| Strongly Disagree | 20 | 20% |

Table 4

*"My lack of Expertise in the area of Special Education limits my ability to teach students with special needs effectively" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 10% | 4% |
| Agree | 30% | 3% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 30% | 4% |
| Disagree | 22% | 56% |
| Strongly Disagree | 8% | 33% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education

*Q2: Throughout teacher training, teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to special education.*

More than half of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with statement, "Throughout teacher training, teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to special education." When these responses are disaggregated by group, we see that more than half of General Education teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This was less than the number of the Special Education teachers who either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.

Teachers' experience levels can be positively impacted by an increase in content-specific knowledge with a pedagogical emphasis. Ball, Hill, and Bass (2005) assert that a teacher's mathematical knowledge is central to how well the teacher can use curriculum materials, assess student progress, and judge how to present, emphasize, and sequence the material. The result of their study demonstrated that teachers' attitudes toward teaching students with disabilities were higher in teachers who have taken four or more math or science content courses. This shows more experiences and knowledgeable with issues with students with disabilities.

Table 5

*"Throughout teacher training, Teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to Special Education."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 34 | 35% |
| Agree | 42 | 43% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 14 | 14% |
| Disagree | 8 | 8% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0% |

*Note*. Response options that received zero endorsements are not reported.

Table 6

*"Throughout teacher training, teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to Special Education" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 26% | 44% |
| Agree | 40% | 46% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 20% | 8% |
| Disagree | 14% | 2% |
| Strongly Disagree | 0% | 0% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education

*Q6: My teacher education program prepared me to teach students with special needs.*

Slightly more than half of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "My teacher education program prepared me to teach students with special needs." When these responses are disaggregated by group, we see that more than half of General Education teachers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. In contrast, majority of Special Education teachers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. A chi-square test was not conducted to determine if the differences between General and Special Education teachers' endorsement of the aforementioned statement were significant. One or more cells had a zero value.

Table 7

*"My Teacher Education program prepared me to teach Students with Special needs."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 12 | 12% |
| Agree | 38 | 39% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 8 | 8% |
| Disagree | 26 | 27% |
| Strongly Disagree | 14 | 14% |

Table 8

*"My Teacher Education program prepared me to teach Students with Special needs" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 4% | 21% |
| Agree | 6% | 73% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 16% | 0% |
| Disagree | 46% | 6% |
| Strongly Disagree | 28% | 0% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education.

*Q8: I have the instructional experience to teach students with special needs effectively.*

Slightly more than half of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "I have the instructional experience to teach students with special needs effectively." When these responses are disaggregated by group, we see that lightly lower than half of General Education teachers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. In contrast, majority of Special Education teachers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. A chi-square test was not conducted to determine if the differences between General and Special Education teachers' endorsement of the aforementioned statement were significant. One or more cells had a zero value.

Table 9

*"I have the instructional experience to teach Students with Special needs effectively."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 19 | 19% |
| Agree | 43 | 44% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 13 | 13% |
| Disagree | 14 | 15% |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 9% |

Table 10

*"I have the instructional experience to teach Students with Special needs effectively" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 12% | 27% |
| Agree | 22% | 67% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 24% | 2% |
| Disagree | 24% | 4% |
| Strongly Disagree | 18% | 0% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education.

*Q16: If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a specialist with experience in special education.*

The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a specialist with experience in special education." When these responses are disaggregated by group, we also see majority of General

Education teachers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. Similarly, all of the Special Education teachers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

In their study, Payzant-Prize (2014) while underscoring the importance of collaboration, expressed that teachers universally point to the impact of teacher collaboration on student learning by improving classroom practice, promoting data use, increasing academic rigor, and supporting students' non-academic needs (Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

Table 11

*Frequency and percent strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) "If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a Specialist with experience in Special Education."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 35 | 36% |
| Agree | 58 | 59% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 4 | 4% |
| Disagree | 1 | 1% |

Table 12

*"If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a Specialist with experience in Special Education" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 42% | 29% |
| Agree | 48% | 71% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 8% | 0% |
| Disagree | 2% | 0% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education.

*Q17: Specialists in the area of special education are really available to answer questions about students with special needs*

The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "Specialists in the area of special education are really available to answer questions about students with special needs." When these responses are disaggregated by group, we also see that majority of General Education teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Similarly, majority of Special Education teachers strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

This is in line with earlier studies on collaborations and co-teaching such as Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007), who synthesized qualitative research examining coteachers' roles, relationships and perceptions. They found that co-teachers believed their practices were beneficial to students, but that co-teaching should be voluntary and not mandatory. Successful teams shared expertise and struggling teams engaged in less collaboration and different teaching styles that lead to conflict. Additionally, many special education teachers were in the assistant teacher role rather than a collaborative partner in the classroom. Austin (2001) in his study, provided evidence that both special and general education teachers believed co-teaching and collaboration contributed to positive academic outcomes for students.

Table 13

*"Specialists in the area of Special Education are really available to answer questions about Students with Special needs."*

| Response Option | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 18 | 18% |
| Agree | 66 | 67% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 9 | 9% |
| Disagree | 5 | 6% |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0% |

Table 14

*"Specialists in the area of Special Education are really available to answer questions about Students with Special needs" by group.*

| Response Option | General Education | Special Education |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 12% | 25% |
| Agree | 70% | 65% |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 10% | 8% |
| Disagree | 8% | 2% |
| Strongly Agree | 0% | 0% |

*Note.* $N = 50$ for General Education; $N = 48$ for Special Education.

**Thematic and Coding Analyses of Open-Ended Interview Responses**

The participants' names in the open-ended interviews have been changed for the purposes of this data analysis, to ensure the confidentiality, and to protect their anonymity. The responses from the interview questions were based on four themes and coded as such: how inclusive the

schools are, existence of instructional collaboration, quality of the collaboration, and degree of helpfulness of the collaboration to students' achievement.

On the first theme, how inclusive the school is, all participants interviewed considered their schools to be inclusive. The one theme that was consistent with all participants was the strong sense of classroom community. They commented on the "welcoming atmosphere" in their school and the "willingness of all staff members and staff to ensure that all students regardless of the disability do their best for all children in the school". A newly appointed teacher in the school commented on how a "team approach" is used in developing lesson plans for both special and general education students by all staff members and how there is a willingness among everyone to help each other. The teachers felt that there was a whole school approach towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the school. One of the teachers expressed that all the students would naturally come together when supported by the teachers in class "so a lot of support systems are formed naturally, but then I do use very specific and intentional buddying approach to encourage and foster cooperative learning. My few special education students who do not communicate well.... I gave them buddies who are very helpful." It always works out because the students know the differences between helping and doing their work. And these were very purposeful and intentional support pattern. These strategies have to be built into the lesson plans for both teachers in the class to understand and follow even when the teacher is teaching a small group and the cooperative teacher is teaching the other group.

The second theme, existence of teacher collaboration in the school, majority of the teachers in their interview report existence of instructional collaboration between the teachers in the classroom. They reported being part of the instructional collaborative team that meet monthly to review data, and map out instructional strategies for the team. To them, collaboration

has positive effects on teachers and their students. Nearly all teachers report that their collaboration was helpful and reported the extent of their collaboration. The general education teachers met with the special education teachers on a regular basis to plan instruction, modifications, and adaptations for all students during collaboration time. Collaboration time differed in its structure from teacher to teacher depending on when it was done. All the participants emphasized the importance of meeting with their special education support teacher colleague. Some of the teachers discussed how the collaboration meeting with the special education teacher had advanced over the course of the school year as both parties acquire confidence in being able to meet the needs of the student with disabilities. A teacher had this to say:

> Without these instructional collaborative meeting, I would have given up teaching students with disabilities in my class. In the meetings, we are able to share ideas and strategies that work in the team meetings and that has helped me in my own class. I have also shared my own frustrations to the team and has gotten advice, particularly at the beginning of the year. It has really been helpful.

The next theme, quality of collaboration, affects the teachers' attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes. Ann Ahlberg (2011) expressed that working on the basis of the inclusion concept, that pupils who are in need of special support benefit from collaboration between class teachers and special educators. The kind of teaching relationships the teachers engage in affects the quality of collaboration. Most teachers in the study revealed that the method practiced in their schools is co-teaching. Prior research also revealed that the most common model of Co-Teaching is one teach, one assist (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). This model enables the special educator to function as an extra

resource in the classroom. In some cases, the teacher's time would be split between two or more classes. More than half of the general education teachers wished to be given the opportunity to have two teachers in their classrooms; class teacher and special educator. This is the situation where you have the special education teacher embedded in one class only. This wish highlighted the importance of common planning time and allow for effective pedagogy. According to one teacher, while underscoring the importance of staying permanent in one class, expressed that "But in one classroom, as I said, it is more like special education teacher and I, now we will go through this and this" and then I am around those that I feel need a little extra support during reviews and even during ordinary work".

The teachers also reported that the quality of collaboration in their school is associated with increased student achievement and teacher improvement. Some of the teachers expressed the importance of open and fluid communication between the teachers in inclusion. One of the new general education teachers expressed collaboration in the following context statements, "I kind of know my co-teacher, we don't necessarily have to meet formally, but if we are going to do something big such as introducing a new topic, I will comfortably ask her to meet to modify some aspects of the lesson for the students with disabilities". Another teacher also expressed that quality of collaboration is high because it enabled for the incorporating modifications and adaptation within the lessons. One of the teachers also observed that the quality of collaboration could be improved because the teachers are responsible for academic success of students with disabilities in their classes.

The last theme, helpfulness of the collaboration to students' achievement in full inclusion. A few of the teachers responded that they are not advocates of full inclusion. Reasons given range from having a lot of students with disabilities require more attention and the other students

moving at a different pace; students with disabilities who are extremely cognitively low cannot keep up with general class thereby causing behavior problems; and that it depends on the kind of disability that the students have and if the teacher has the ability and capability to modify the instructions to meet the needs of the students. One general education teacher stated,

> I have never received any professional development resources to help me teach children with disabilities. The collaborative teachers are in the classroom for a very brief time. Their assistance varies on an individual basis – some are very helpful; some are not so helpful.

Another general education teacher expressed,

> Many teachers are put in the inclusion setting without any special education experience. This puts the teacher as well as the student at a disadvantage because the teacher is not effectively teaching the student.

For these few teachers, collaboration with special education teachers in tends to be difficult. This is well in line with inclusive education literature and some earlier studies (Savolainen, Englebrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012) in suggesting that collaboration may bear special importance in making attitudes toward inclusion more favorable. Collaboration at a teacher level produces benefits in commitment to each other and the school. In collective learning, teachers accept higher responsibility for students' learning and integration (Lee et al., 2011). General education teachers perceived they require more collaboration with special education. They also perceived the time is not available to collaborate. Increased training was desired through special education interaction and collaboration.

Majority of the teachers advocated for full inclusion because of the social benefits to both the general and special education students; the students benefit from the rich learning

environment; it provides an opportunity for the students to learn alongside their peers in a regular environment and finally, it makes for diverse population of students who learn from each other. The teachers underscored the importance of collaboration in their school as the reason they still favor full inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes. All students learn differently. This is a principal of inclusive education. One key teaching strategy is to break students into small groups. By using small groups, teaching can be tailored to the way each student learns best. When a teacher gives every student multiple paths to learning. It is called differentiated instruction. This can only happen when there is an effective co-teaching method, where the two teachers are in one classroom according to some teachers interviewed.

Almost all the teachers expressed the need for more professional development training on collaboration for all the teachers involve in inclusion. All ten teachers would like more on-going staff development training on issues relating to the students with disabilities. One teacher commented on the fact there is not enough time dedicated to these kinds of training by the school administration. According to her, most of the staff development trainings are geared toward standardized tests and not special education related. Eight teachers commented on how lack of essential resources for teaching children with special needs made it more difficult for them to teach these children. Among the resources teachers perceived to be necessary were: computers, iPads with earphones and concrete materials. Teachers and the principal expressed the view that, notwithstanding the excellent goodwill of the school staff, it is difficult to carry out plans without, what they considered to be the necessary resources and supports in place.

**Integration of Interview Questions with Survey Results**

These responses support the survey data that indicated teachers, both general and special education, largely did not agree that special education students posed a negative impact on the social climate of the classroom or teachers' ability to implement and teach core curriculum. Teachers experiences with teaching students with disabilities is strongly connected with teachers' attitudes towards pupils with disability. This indicates that, the more teachers interact and become knowledgeable of teaching inclusion, they more positive their attitudes are toward such pupils. Moreover, teacher's experience has been found to also promote student's sense of efficacy, fostering students' involvement in class activities and their efforts in facing difficulties (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 2001).

Although, the majority did agree that having special education students in a given class does affect the teacher's effectiveness. Responses from the interview questions also point to the need for a collaborative model--partnership between general education and special education teachers--to be realized in the real-world setting. Kimbrough and Mellen (2012) found out in their study that general and special educators expressed frustration over the lack of time to collaborate with special education teachers regarding appropriate interventions and modifications that could grant further exposure to the general education curriculum. A common complaint for general educators was a feeling that they had little to no input on the instructional activities and content that students with disabilities should participate in while in the general education classroom. General education teachers believed that students with disabilities would master a greater amount of general curriculum content if the general education teachers had more direct input into the instructional methods used with and content taught to special needs students (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Matzen, Ryndak, & Nakao, 2010).

Collaboration must happen so that students with special needs are not falling through the cracks of miscommunication, or lack thereof, and inabilities to mesh teaching styles and strategies. The following comments were made by three special education teachers:

> Another challenge we face is dealing with general educators. No one provides a clear and open message that you want to support what is best for the student. General education teachers do not have an open mind about the process. Many teachers do not work collaboratively and reveal their anxieties and concerns that are not warranted.
>
> It is the relationship of both teachers that will determine the success of the program. The extent of the collaboration using their planning times effectively, and putting into perspective the various individual disabilities and experiences do make a positive difference in the program.
>
> I have been fortunate to work with General Education teachers who support my SPED students one hundred percent. These teachers have asked me when they are puzzled as how to best serve our students. Together we find a workable solution. Again, it is important to have that excellent working relationship with the content teacher.

**Summary**

Information in this chapter presented descriptive analysis of the survey findings and the thematic and coding analysis of the open-ended interviews as they relate to the research questions. The survey portion provided results that show the teachers' attitudes toward including students with disabilities, the teachers' experiences in providing diverse learning experiences for the students with disabilities and the number of years teaching including students with special needs. The thematic and coding analysis provided information on identifying whether there is collaboration in inclusion classes, the extent of collaboration, the quality of collaboration and

professional development needs that focused on promoting effective collaboration in inclusive classrooms. The study also provided information on the extent the teachers' teaching experiences offer a greater sense of overall effectiveness, and effectiveness in the use of educational strategies. It underscored the importance of having experienced and knowledgeable teachers in inclusion classroom. These experienced teachers increase all aspects of collaboration in the team as well as increasing the learning ability of all students in the inclusion classes. According to a study by Abatzidou et al (2012), when teachers are aware of the educational reality, then they consider their role adequate and thus develop a sufficient sense of self-efficacy through collaboration.

The analysis indicated the strongest relationships between teachers' attitudes toward including students with disabilities and to teachers' experiences that increases their ability to effectively teach the students with disabilities. The teachers with very high attitude towards students with special needs also nurture and promote effective collaboration in the inclusion classes. To further support these findings, when asked about their experiences with inclusion students in their classes, four teachers reported their experiences to be from not so good to mix, while four reposted having great experiences. Few teachers reported having mix feelings due to largely that the students are not cognitively able to participate in the class and that the students struggle with the contents and their distractibility in the class. Majority of the teachers underscore that importance of collaboration with their teaching counterparts in providing effective learning experiences to meet the needs of all students. The teachers also reported their view of an effective collaboration process, when teachers "share their diversity of knowledge and expertise in order to define the needs of the student and then plan, implement, assess, follow

through, and follow up on ways of helping learners develop to their fullest" (Dettmer, Knackendoffel, & Thurston, 2013).

Some teachers expressed that they have been poorly trained and do not have enough collaborative time for planning. They also opined that the amount of responsibility placed on them to ensure the success of these students is unfair and unrealistic. One described it as "enormous pressure on the teachers is idealistic and takes the fun of teachings out of the classroom". One of the teachers bemoaned the idea of full inclusion because it brings down the educational level of the general education students and setting unattainable goals for the students with disabilities. The students are always struggling and require additional assistance which the teachers are able to provide. Majority look towards instructional collaboration as an importance aspect of the teaching and learning relationship that has helped them in inclusion classes. The teachers who participated in effective collaboration in their various teams have great success in the teaching students with disabilities. These statement support the survey results which suggest general education teachers, in particular, are not adequately prepared to understand the laws around special education or to teach inclusion students in their classes, but are very willing to collaborate with their special education teachers.

The co-teaching method used in the school system does not encourage and enable effective collaboration. They also reported that the special education teachers do not spend more time with the students in the inclusion classes. There is little or no support from school leadership. There is not enough professional development training; very little support from the administration (varies from school to school); paid time for remediation instructions for the general education teachers to prepare them and get them ready for teaching the students with

disabilities. Less than half of teachers (special education English Teachers) expressed that there are enough training and leadership support in providing inclusion services for the students.

Berry (2010) expressed that teachers who have favorable attitudes toward inclusion generally believe that students with disabilities belong in general education classrooms, that they can learn there, and that the teachers have confidence in their abilities to teach students with disabilities. The teachers in inclusion should be provided with professional development opportunities and other resources in the form of information and tools (LaBarbera, 2017). The result from this study supports the findings in previous research on self-efficacy and providing teachers with the training and tools necessary to foster positive attitudes about inclusion is a key step to insuring the success of inclusion (Colber, 2010). New insights gained from this study will be discussed in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

## Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the attitudes of school teachers toward inclusion in middle school general education setting. The teachers' attitude about inclusion have been made germane in the recent push for total inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. These teachers 'attitudes are also important in ensuring a positive inclusion and creating effective learning conditions for the students with disabilities in middle school general education setting. The two research questions investigated were: (1) What are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities? (2) How do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate to meet the needs of students in their classes?

These research questions sought to find a difference between special and general education teachers' attitudes about the inclusion process; what are the experiences of special and general education teachers in middle school inclusive classrooms instructing students with disabilities; to determine the degree of collaboration between the special and general education teachers and years of experiences and their perceptions about the students with disabilities in inclusion; to determine whether there was a significant collaborative relationship of the special and general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms; and the areas of needs, resources and support of the teachers inclusion. The findings in this study did not reveal any new knowledge about inclusion or its impact in the classroom, rather it confirms what the profession has longed perceived. This chapter will therefore discuss the findings of the current study of teacher attitudes toward inclusion, the factors that influence teacher attitudes toward inclusion, and compare the findings from this study to the results reported in the literature.

**Summary of the Results**

This study examined teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and how their experiences and collaboration shape their behaviors in the classroom. The content of each of the data sources (qualitative descriptive survey and open-ended interviews) were analyzed for each case individually and then categorized by themes. The following themes were identified: (a) Students' with and without disabilities were involve in inclusive classroom activities, (b) teachers' attitudes appear to be influenced by experiences in inclusive classrooms, (c) adequate teacher collaboration is an important phenomenon for effective inclusion teachers, (d) collaboration enables the teachers to meet the students' individual needs in the inclusion classrooms and (e) professional development training that enhances teachers' aptitude for effective inclusion process. This case study produced a vast amount of information for each participant and theme.

The teachers' experiences revealed to be strongly related to teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities. This indicates that teachers with more years of experiences in inclusion teaching are better prepared to effectively teach students with disabilities in the classrooms than those with less years of experiences. These experienced teachers also tend to have positive attitudes toward inclusive classrooms based on the data from the study. Results to the questions related to experiences indicate that special education teachers more than the general education teachers, feel adequately prepared in teaching the students with disabilities. More than half of the general education teachers agree with the statement that teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to special education to enable them be knowledgeable and acquire more experiences with inclusion.

It is no doubt then that more than half of general education teachers expressed the need for professional development training because they were not adequately prepared at their teacher

education programs. However, majority of the special education teachers opined that their teacher education program adequately prepared them to teach all students in inclusion. They therefore feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of all students in inclusion. Some of the general education teachers feel that they do not have instructional experiences to teach students with special needs, while more than half agreed that their knowledge of special education principles and procedures are limited. Niesyn (2009) found that traditional teacher education training primarily focuses on "preparing teachers to work with groups of students across content domains with less attention given to individual differences or special needs" (p.227). This study also portrayed that teachers with adequate training and experiences tend to have positive attitude toward inclusion and are very prepared to meet the needs of all the students in the classrooms. DeBoer, Piji, and Minnaert (2010) focused primarily on the attitude and satisfaction of the general educator in the inclusive setting noting that their dissatisfaction was often a result of lack of training, experience, and knowledge

The data from this study exposed a variety of resources to facilitate collaboration and promote positive attitude towards inclusion in the classrooms. To answer the question, how do middle school teachers working in inclusive classrooms collaborate meet the needs of students in their classes is a direct relationship with the teachers' positive attitude towards inclusion. The majority of the teachers interviewed expressed that experiences in an inclusive classrooms enabled them to become better collaborative partners in the learning process. One of the teachers described a positive learning experience that involved a student with a disability with which she was unfamiliar. "That experience gave me a chance to see it (the particular disability). I knew nothing about it. I had a chance to read up on it and I got some information on it. I thought that was really beneficial" (interview). Most of the teachers agreed that a collaborative model

benefits students the most. Teachers expressed that "coteaching benefits everyone because of the number of experts in the classroom and you will have a high-level learning environment for all students". 'All students need experienced teachers, not just one group,' said another. In response to the benefits of co-teaching and collaboration, four teachers stated that, "two heads are better than one." The quality of instruction goes up for all students, not just students with disabilities. Collaboration done effectively, with a clear purpose and structure, will yield successful results for both teachers and students. Friend (2000) buttressed the need for collaboration and co-teaching to support inclusion,

> virtually every treatise on inclusive practices, whether conceptual, anecdotal, qualitative, or quantitative, concludes that inclusion's success in large part relies on collaboration among staff members and with parents and others, and that failures can typically be traced to shortcomings in the collaborative dimension of the services to students. (p. 130)

Therefore, it is important for teachers to collaborate with one another in providing effective learning experiences to all students.

In their willingness to collaborate, the majority of respondents agreed with the statement, "If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a specialist with experience in special education." Majority of both the general and special education teachers expressed that they are open to seeking additional professional training to be adequately prepared to meet the needs of all students regardless of disabilities. On the next statement on willingness to collaborate, majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, "Specialists in the area of special education are really available to answer questions about students with special needs." Results of this study suggest that there is teacher collaboration in the school, majority of the teachers in their interview responses reported the existence of instructional collaboration

between teachers in the classroom. They expressed being part of the instructional collaborative team that meet monthly to review data, and map out instructional strategies for the team. To them, collaboration has positive effects on teachers and their students. Six teachers advocated for full inclusion because of the social benefits to both the general and special education students; the students benefit from the rich learning environment; it provides an opportunity for the students to learn alongside their peers in a regular environment and finally, it makes for diverse population of students who learn from each other. Greenberg and Nilsen (2014) stated that,

> ability to collaborate is perceived as an essential component of education – 95% of those surveyed say that the ability to collaborate is important, just behind those who believe problem solving is essential (96%). These two skills lead the pack of soft skills and are perceived as extremely important to preparing learners for work life. (p. 3)

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The findings in this study are more confirmatory than revelatory. Rather than revealing new knowledge about inclusion and its impact in the classroom, it confirms what the profession has longed perceived. There is overwhelming agreement that most teachers believe that students with disabilities should be educated in regular classrooms. Majority of respondents revealed that all the students with disabilities belong in the inclusion classroom. There also appears to be broad consensus that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion is critical in implementing the ambitious goal of inclusive schools and for these strategies to be successful. This also conforms with the result of previous research on inclusion that show that inclusive settings increase the opportunities for students with significant disabilities to have access to content delivered in the general education setting as well as increased opportunities to interact with same-age peers without disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2006).

The results from the current study further contribute to the accumulation of knowledge that can unpack the complex pattern of factors that should be considered to promote positive attitudes towards inclusive schools (Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten, & Falkmer, 2013). In this study, majority of the teachers interviewed advocated for inclusion because of the social benefits, the rich learning environment and more importantly, it provides an opportunity for the students with disabilities to learn alongside their peers in a regular environment. They underscore the importance of collaboration in the school, and developing team approach in emerging instructional strategies for inclusion classes. Finally, it makes for diverse population of students who learn from each other. This confirms with earlier studies that an in-depth involvement in inclusive is more related to positive attitude toward students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Having the teachers commit to inclusion and enhances their attitudes and enables them to build an effective collaboration in inclusive classroom. According to Forlin and Sin (2017), unless teachers believe that all children should be included in regular classes, it is difficult to get them to commit to making the necessary modifications to cater to each child's personal needs. Similarly, unless they are trained in methods for including learners, not all children will be provided with the necessary and most appropriate support to achieve their potentials. Importantly, the current study provides greater insights into teachers' years of experiences and collaborative relationships on their attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities.

**Teachers' Experiences and Attitudes toward Inclusion**

Importantly the current study provides greater insights into teachers' experiences and collaborative relationships on attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. The

contemporary school classrooms are made up of students with various backgrounds, needs, and disabilities and this makes a strong appeal to teachers' ability to organize and execute their daily teaching tasks. The extent and level of teachers experiences with teaching students with disabilities in classes affect their various attitudes toward inclusion because with the experiences, they perceive themselves capable of providing adequate and effective learning opportunities. Teachers become willing to open up their classes for these students and very will to collaborate with other teachers to increase their academic performances. Kini and Podoisky (2016) reviewed 30 studies published within the last 15 years that analyze the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in the United States, the authors found that: (1) Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are most steep in teachers' initial years, but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers. (2) As teachers gain experience, their students not only learn more, as measured by standardized tests, they are also more likely to do better on other measures of success, such as school attendance. (3) Teachers' effectiveness increases at a greater rate when they teach in a supportive and collegial working environment, and when they accumulate experience in the same grade level, subject, or district. (4) More-experienced teachers support greater student learning for their colleagues and the school as a whole, as well as for their own students (p. 1).

This study underscores the importance of providing the teachers the opportunity to develop and nurture. In this study, Majority of general education teachers expressed that their teacher education program did not adequately prepare them to teach students with disabilities. While majority of the special education teachers pointed to their teacher education program as providing them with adequate training needed to teach the students in inclusion. It is important

provide equal training opportunities to the general education teachers in inclusion. Teachers' experiences revealed to be strongly connected with teachers' attitudes towards pupils with disability.

Our results show that a majority of teachers in inclusion believed themselves to be able to teach pupils with disabilities in inclusive classrooms due largely to been knowledgeable and possessing the necessary on-the-job experiences. The results of the studies on influences of a specific education training background on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion demonstrated that, level of training is an important factor in the formation of more positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion and newly qualified teachers may realize that they are not adequately prepared which may increase attrition rates among teachers (Makinen, 2013). The teachers' attitudes toward the students with disabilities increases when they believe that they are capable of influencing the students' behavior and academic learning needs. In this study, majority of respondents revealed that they are open to collaborating with other specialists or teachers in the inclusion process. According to Beth Hamilton (2013) "be open and collaborative. Be willing to learn from others and share your knowledge. Remember that the job we do is for ALL kids. Make sure if you find something that works to educate your students, that you share it with your colleagues in your school or district so they, too, can use it to support and teach their students. The more we share and work together – the better educated our students will be" (p.1). This helps teachers gain confidence and instructional efficacy in teaching inclusive classes. This is in line with research of Sorlie and Torsheim (2011) who found that teachers reported less problems in their classroom when there was a relatively high collaborative relationship among the teachers in the school.

In this study, the importance of professional development training for the teachers are underscored in developing and sustaining teachers' experiences. On-the-job training is essential to ensure teachers have the skills needed to teach all students in their classroom, especially those teachers who may have attended teacher preparation years ago or missed out on training about disabilities. Majority of the teachers agree with the statement that teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to special education. Bornman and Donohue (2013) and Oswald (2007) insisted that teachers are at the forefront of the transformation of schools to become more inclusive and they need to be offered expanded and enriched professional development opportunities in order to reduce implementation problems can be reduced. High-quality professional development is of critical importance in ensuring that teachers and other school professionals have the necessary skills to implement and sustain new practices that are needed to support inclusive programs. Finally, a recent study from mainland China by Zan, Liu, Wang, and Sharma (2011) observed that teachers with high self-efficacy for inclusive practices had lower levels of anxiety about inclusive education.

**Collaboration and Attitude towards Inclusion**

The results from the teachers' open-ended interviews supported the survey results and confirmed that collaboration between both groups of teachers is ongoing and encouraged. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement, "If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a specialist with experience in special education." Collaboration between general and special education teachers is grounded in the idea that each teacher has a unique knowledge base and expertise (Cook & Friend, 2006; Garderen et al., 2009), combining both expertise would result in a successful process of collaboration. Teachers must work together to create the best learning environment possible for all students. Classrooms are no longer only one

teacher instructing several students. On the contrary, classrooms have become much more integrated with other adults such as, paraprofessionals, one on one aide, and other teachers pushing in the classroom. One such teacher may be the special education teacher or related service provider. Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, and Malinen (2012) discovered that the self-efficacy, especially efficacy in collaboration, had a positive relationship with the attitudes towards inclusive education.

The data also show that all the teachers noted that collaboration as effective as they want it to be. The teachers expressed that collaboration and resources provided to them are not very adequate. The co-teaching method used in the school system does not encourage and enable effective collaboration. They complained that the special education teachers do not spend more time with the students in the inclusion classes. There is little or no support from school leadership. Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom, J. (2015) expressed that school and teacher factors influence the quality and type of collaboration. Teachers' rate of improvement increases more rapidly if they work in a school with higher-quality collaboration than they would if they worked in a school with lower-quality collaboration. Teacher collaboration has strong and positive effects on student achievement, particularly when the collaboration is about assessment. Collaboration tends to be the glue that will bind the special and general education teachers together into a common goal of implementing inclusion model. The general and special education teachers in inclusion in the schools should buy into the co-teaching model practiced in the school. It should be understood by all the participants involve in the inclusion practice through professional training opportunities. One general education teacher stated,

> I have never received any professional development resources to help me teach children with disabilities. The collaborative teachers are in the classroom for a very brief time.

> Their assistance varies on an individual basis – some are very helpful; some are not so helpful.

Another general education teacher said,

> Many teachers are put in the inclusion setting without any special education experience. This puts the teacher as well as the student at a disadvantage because the teacher is not effectively teaching the student.

Finally, a special education teacher made the following comments:

> There is no doubt that lack of or inadequate training of the special education and the general education teachers does affect their relationship with the students with disabilities. In a situation where the special education teacher is adequately trained but the general education teacher is not, the [special education teacher] has to take responsibility of making the [general education teacher] aware of the various methods that will be appropriate to effectively teach the disabled students.

There was also a positive relationship between general education teachers' expertise and their perception that students with disabilities have a negative impact on the classroom environment. As the level of experiences and expertise increased, general education teachers tended to strongly disagree with the idea that students with disabilities negatively impact the classroom environment.

Professional development is an essential component for collaboration with inclusive classrooms. All teachers and support providers have expressed throughout the studies that they felt that professional development would help them to better contribute in their collaborative team and better support student needs. The knowledge, skills and attitudes required to become

global-ready educators are now also essential attributes for teachers in the 21st century. Understanding how to effectively use the growing resources for the education of the students with disabilities requires, effective collaboration of teachers in inclusion classes. The importance of professional development training cannot be overemphasized as majority of respondents underscored its importance in teaching all the students regardless of disabilities. There is a need to encourage collaboration and provision of training to the teachers to enable them meet the students learning needs. Collaborative platform that facilitates resource discovery and best practices gives teachers ownership in their own professional development.

Collaboration helps break down the barriers of teacher isolation and promotes an environment of face-to-face interactions, which was noted as a benefit by the teachers interviewed for this study. Williams (2010) contented that collaboration helps break down the barriers of teacher isolation and promotes an environment of face-to-face interactions, which was noted as a benefit by the teachers interviewed for this study. Barth (2006) expressed that school quality and student achievement depend upon the degree to which educators can work with each other in professional partnerships. Collaboration builds these partnerships between professional educators in a school beyond the few close colleagues that most teachers seek out as their sounding boards for support. Barth has also consistently highlighted that developing the ability among school personnel to function as professional collegial communities would bring effective outcomes and substantive school improvement. Teachers need opportunities to collegiate with each other to best serve their students, to make their work more meaningful, and to transform schooling in a way that keeps it vibrant and relevant (Dillon, 2003). The conception is that teachers are at their best when they are working together professionally and are supported by school leadership.

Teachers in this study felt that their instructional process has improved as a result of their work in collaboration, demonstrating a positive relationship between collaboration and increased teacher self-efficacy. Schools should be proud of how far they have come in providing appropriate and necessary education for students with disabilities that benefit the whole school and society as well as the students without disabilities. According to a study by Abatzidou et al (2012), when teachers are aware of the educational reality, then they consider their role adequate and thus develop a sufficient sense of self-efficacy. As a result, the knowledge of the legal framework of special education influences teachers' efficacy in educational process.

**Limitations**

This study used a qualitative survey questions and open-ended interview questions for a limited number of teachers rather than a robust interview questions that could have elicited richer and more in-depth information about the difficulties and attitudes of the teachers in inclusive classes. The research also involved general education teachers and special education teachers from the middle schools in the school district and thus might not be generalized to other educators, areas, or levels of schooling. However, the schools involved represented a wide array of settings, sizes, socioeconomic statuses, and degree of inclusion. The study might require replication in other school districts. Another limitation is that the result of this study was based on a cross-sectional analysis. The inferences about teachers' experiences, collaboration, and attitudes toward inclusive education have to be done with caution. Longitudinal data would tell us more about how changes in time and contextual factors affect teachers' experiences, collaboration and attitudes towards inclusion. They are unique from other types of research because of their timeline. This means that the same subjects are observed multiple times (often in

the course of many years), instead of the researchers trying to collect data from various subjects with the aim to study the same variables.

One key advantage of performing longitudinal study is their ability to show patterns of a variable over time, which is a very powerful way through which researchers come to learn about the relationships of cause and effect. With a clear focus, longitudinal studies would also see how a particular end state or a set of circumstances would come to be. And though people usually might not remember past events, it can be solved by means of actual recording, thus ensuring a high level of validity. Further research needs to done in reference to a larger number of schools and teachers that could have been studied to gain a wider knowledge of the strategies that functioned, so that information could be gathered to modify the inclusion program.

**Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The results showed that teacher's experiences with students with disabilities and collaboration is needed for effective inclusion. There is limited and low level collaboration in the schools, a new knowledge which is different from what was perceived. The school leadership was under the impression that there was adequate collaboration within the school. Teachers perceive the concept of collaboration between each other as working separately with the same student with special needs in inclusion classes. Indeed, collaboration here is not seen as a continuous process that involve them both working interactively together in order to meet the student's special educational needs. To great extent, teachers still do not understand how to collaborate and what are the roles that each should play in this process. Moreover, collaboration encounters different constrains, as this study revealed, which included teachers large teaching and administrative workload, large number of students per classroom, teachers lack of awareness

and negative attitude toward students with special needs and the lack of appropriate support from both school administration and families.

It was also noted from the study that the teachers' experiences are closely related to staff development training and the teacher preparatory programs in the schools. The general education teachers are being exposed to the special education principles and laws that would enable them to be effective in teaching the students with disabilities. The programs need to be updated to meet the requirements of inclusion to include the concept of collaboration. The preparation programs do not provide training related to how to work collaboratively in inclusive settings. This is rendered teachers lacking the necessary knowledge, pedagogies and attitudes.

**Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

1. This study would be more beneficial if conducted throughout the entire school district which would provide a larger sample for the study. This would allow the researcher to determine whether there are any differences in teachers' experiences and the extent of effective collaboration within all special education disciplines and general education teachers. This study could also be conducted with an entire school district. This would allow the researcher to look at elementary, middle, and high school levels, and again determine if there are any differences in attitude levels within the separate schools.
2. The administration in the schools should provide more support to teachers by allowing more time to plan and implement training to increase competencies and ongoing knowledge that will allow teachers the opportunity to be able to meet the needs of the students with disabilities.

3. The general education teachers and support staff increase their own competencies by seeking out available trainings.
4. The researcher also recommends providing appropriate professional development trainings to enable both general and special education teachers acquire the knowledge and experiences in the area of inclusive education in general, and collaboration in particular. Improving school environment to enable teachers collaborate together. For example, reducing teachers' teaching and administrative workload, reducing the number of students per classroom and providing more support from school administration.

**Conclusion**

Teachers' experiences with students with disabilities and effective collaboration constitute best practices for ensuring effective life-long learning for teachers in maintaining inclusive educational practices. It would seem unquestionable that, to sustain the professionalism of teachers an effective and highly relevant program of learning must be implemented so that they remain up to date on changes in thinking and practices about teaching. It is important for schools to continue to provide strategic plans for increasing maintaining teachers' efficacy and collaboration for effective inclusion process.

Teachers like the ones in this study and the professionals who support them within the classroom, need opportunities to increase their knowledge, understanding, and implementation of inclusive practices within their classrooms. There are a number of things that administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers can do in order to maximize the effectiveness of in-class supports. District and/or building administrators need to provide teachers and paraprofessionals with opportunities to enhance their collaboration skills. Teachers

need to be open to developing collaborative relationships. Finally, general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals need to be consistently supported throughout the collaboration and inclusion process. All students, not just students with disabilities, would benefit a great deal if all of the stakeholders took an active role in improving the effectiveness of in-class supports.

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## Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### Explanations:

#### *What does "fraudulent" mean?*

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

#### *What is "unauthorized" assistance?*

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

**Statement of Original Work (Continued)**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.*

Digital Signature

Eucharia N. Nnawulezi

Name (Typed)

02/13/2018

Date

## Appendix B: Inclusion Survey[1]

Thank you for your participation in this study. To ensure anonymity, do not write your name on it. The purpose of this study is to survey your attitude toward inclusion. Results of this study will be made available to participants. However, no names or other identifying information will be presented. Your answers are completely confidential. Please take your time and answer each item in a manner that reflects your perspective. When responding to the statements please keep mind that the term "special needs" is intended to include all categories of special education. Please circle only one number per question.

**Part I:** Please complete the following information about yourself.

1. Please check years of completed teaching experience:

___0 – 4 ___5 – 10

___11 – 15 ___16+

2. Gender:____Male ___Female

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

___American Indian ___Hispanic/Latino
___Asian/Pacific Islander ___White, Non-Hispanic
___Black, Non-Hispanic ___Other_____

4. Area in which you currently teach:

___General Education ___Special Education

5. I believe my level of expertise in Special Education is:

___None – I never had a class or experience with children with special needs.

___Minimal – I have had either a class and/ or some experience with children with special needs, but I do not feel I know enough to be an affective instructor.

___Adequate – I have had classes and/or experience teaching children with special needs and feel I can adequately teach these students in my classroom.

___High – I feel very comfortable teaching students with special needs.

[1] From *The Attitudes of Special and Regular Education Teachers regarding Students with Special Needs in General Education Classrooms,* by Laura L. Suggs, 2005, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University. Copyright 2005. Used with permission of the author.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Part II**: Please circle the number that best describes your feeling about each statement:1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree | | | | | |
| My lack of expertise in the area of special education limits my ability to teach students with special needs effectively. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Throughout teacher training, teachers should be required to take more courses pertaining to special education. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| All students with students with special needs should be integrated in the general education classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students with special needs have a negative impact on the learning environment within the classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The presence of students with special needs in my general education classes have caused me to reduce the amount of core curriculum I normally teach during a school year. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My teacher education program prepared me to teach students with special needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| There are students with special needs that are not suited for the general education classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I have the instructional experience to teach students with special needs effectively. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students with special needs are socially adjusted in the general education classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The number of students with special needs within a given classroom affects a teacher's effectiveness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The presence of students with special needs in my general education class has an effect on the implementation of core curriculum. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Students with special needs usually cause disruptive classroom behaviors. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My knowledge of special education laws is limited. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| General education classmates socially reject students who have special needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General education teachers are adequately informed about special education laws. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| If the need arose, I would feel comfortable seeking advice from a specialist with experience in special education. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Specialists in the area of special education are really available to answer questions about students with special needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Appendix C: Inclusion Open-Ended Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to this follow-up interview questions. The purpose of this survey is to get more in-depth and thoughtful responses regarding the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom. The insight you provide will be valuable to this study.

Please take your time to respond to the following questions. Your responses will remain anonymous; they will not be linked to any identifying information. Please feel free to contact me at euchariannawulezi@spsk12.net if you should have any questions or concerns.

**Inclusion** is a term that expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services) and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with other students).

Full inclusion means that all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, will be in a regular classroom/program full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting.

1. Are you an advocate or opponent of full inclusion? Please explain your answer.

2. What has been your experience with having inclusion students in your classroom?

3. The Reauthorization of IDEA and the No Child Left Behind Act has put a lot of responsibility on teachers to provide services and a least restrictive environment for students with disabilities.
   Please share your thoughts on this legislative change and the impact it has had in your classroom.

4. What benefits (if any) do you feel students with disabilities receive from being taught in the general education classroom?

5. What are the resources (e.g. time, professional development) and support (e.g. administrative) made available to you to teach children with disabilities?
   Are they adequate?

Thank you for your Participation!