The Lived Experiences of General and Special Education Teachers When Implementing Personalized Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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The Lived Experiences of General and Special Education Teachers When Implementing Personalized Learning: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Valia Lopez Thompson
Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

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

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Concordia University–Portland

2019
Abstract

Currently, in the state of Illinois, over two million students are enrolled in public schools. Despite the implementation of Common Core State Standards, only 34% of those students are ready for the next academic level (Illinois Report Card, 2018b). Current research indicates that general education teachers who implemented personalized instruction met all students’ needs. To provide background information on personalized instruction, the conceptual framework of this study used the work of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. The researcher gathered data from initial and follow-up interviews, and reflective journals. The researcher employed the use of the interpretive and inductive methods to analyze the data. The primary themes of the findings include: comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, critical need for personalized education, levels of knowledge and understanding, motivation to move away from traditional methods, stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation, friendliness of implementation and management, major barriers, beliefs about teaching content without personalized learning, effectiveness when integrated into normal routines, journal observations and insights and enhancing achievement. The recommendation of this study is to create a personalized instruction committee comprised of both general and special educators to design and disseminate information through professional development courses that focus on effective practices and training when implementing personalized instruction. Implications for social change are that with the proper training, time, and administrative supports and cohesiveness amongst staff, personalized instruction could be successful.

Keywords: essence, flexibility, general education teacher, personalized learning self-efficacy, special-education teacher, student-centered learning
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my oldest brother Craig Thompson. Although he is no longer with me, I know he would be so proud of what I have accomplished.
Acknowledgments

I want to first thank my family for believing in me and supporting me throughout this process. I also want to thank my committee for their words of encouragement and support to finish strong. I especially want to thank Dr. Rinyka Allison for pushing me and not allowing me to quit. Finally, I would like to thank Samuel Seccuro Jr., Jenny Mayo, and Leslie Rinehart for allowing me to utilize their interview questions.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Data revealed that the Chicago Board of Education had only 29% of students who were college-ready compared to the state’s average of 51% in the 2016–2017 academic school year (Illinois Report Card, 2018a). Teachers feel pressured to teach to the state’s mandated tests (Johnsen, 2016). Student promotion still occurs even though students may not have mastered leveled content (Johnsen, 2016). Grouping students by age and teaching the students the same way has not necessarily been a useful model as all children are not academically on the same level (Burke & Fried, 2015). Teachers have tried to transition from this outdated model to a more personalized approach, but there have been many challenges faced in doing so (Horn, 2017). Personalized learning may be able to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. However, since there are so many definitions of the approach of personalized learning, this study sought to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of teachers who are one of the major stakeholders involved in its implementation.

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

Background

Providing differentiated and individualized instruction has been a goal of educators for decades. The outdated model of factory schooling popularized by the Prussians grouped students by age not grades. Educators taught the same subjects, in the same way, and at the same pace to all children in the classroom (Burke & Fried, 2015). However, current technologies are empowering schools to implement this form of education in a manner never before possible (Kerns, 2013).
Context

Both students and teachers are finding that online technology individualized learning programs such as Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and other competency-based open systems help personalize the learning process and maximizes learning time. K–12 schools across the U.S. and Canada faced with growing class size, and fewer resources have come to rely on an individualized learning model supported by technology (Burke & Fried, 2015). Currently, there is some optimism in secondary education due to the proliferation of online learning. Such learning has created unprecedented access to a wide range of academic content, laying the groundwork for a competency-based education system and an individually tailored educational experience (Kerns, 2013). Hence, individualized learning programs hold the potential of dramatically reshaping K–12 into an active, individualized learning experience for every student.

History

Fred Keller, along with other researchers and theorists, introduced the individualized learning model in the 1960s (Pappas, 2014a). Through individualized instruction, the student receives instruction based upon the individual student’s needs (Pappas, 2014a). Keller’s plan of instruction reflected four principles: each learner should complete all work individually at the learner’s pace, continuous assessment for mastery, encouragement through written materials, and the educator acting as a guide (Pappas, 2014a). Although the student is encouraged to be responsible for the student’s learning, the teacher must also know the student’s abilities.

Conceptual Framework for the Problem

This study explored the phenomenon known as personalized instruction. To provide background information on personalized instruction, the conceptual framework of this study used the work of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. Gardner (2011) suggested that there are
nine multiple human intelligences: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential.

The success of the implementation of multiple intelligences depends on four factors, according to Gardner: assessment, curriculum, teacher education, and community participation (Campbell, 2018). Teachers need to continually assess students for mastery of content as well as learning styles to ensure that students learn in a way that benefits the student using a curriculum that is pertinent to today’s society with competent teachers with help from parents as well as community members (Campbell, 2018). By using Gardner’s suggestions, teachers have the opportunity to reach as many students as possible.

In regards to multiple intelligences, Gardner compared the human brain to a computer (Strauss, 2013). The brain does not focus on just one entity, rather several autonomous computers in the human mind that perceive things differently (Strauss, 2013). As the teacher learns more about the student, the teacher can transition from a one-size fit all approach to a more appropriate and practical approach that ministers each student (Strauss, 2013). Gardner (2011) described each of the multiple intelligences as such. A student who has strength in words learns best verbally/linguistically (Gardner, 2011). A student who is good with numbers or solving puzzles has logical/mathematical strengths (Gardner, 2011). A student who has strength in visual/spatial intelligence can visualize things on small as well as large scales (Gardner, 2011). Students who have strength in the bodily/kinesthetic learning style can use one’s body in a way to solve problems (Gardner, 2011). Aural or musical learners are strong with patterns of sound (Gardner, 2011). Students who have strength in interpersonal intelligence can detect other’s feelings and emotions and can respond appropriately (Gardner, 2011). Students with strength in intrapersonal intelligence are aware of one’s feelings and thought processes (Gardner, 2011). A
student who can recognize and categorize objects in nature is strong in naturalist intelligence (Gardner, 2011). Finally, a student who thinks deeply about human existence is strong in existential intelligence (Gardner, 2011).

Gardner’s (2011) theory proposed that there is no set way that individuals perceive information, but there are several learning paths that one could take in information to process and retain. Gardner’s (2011) theory took on a student-centered approach in which the instructor can personalize instruction based on the students’ uniqueness and distinct way of learning. By applying Gardner’s approach, the teacher can tap into students’ strengths and boost students’ confidence which may have a direct effect on the student’s weaknesses (Strauss, 2013).

The utilization of Gardner’s multiple intelligences in the classroom, allows the teacher to engage learners in a variety of ways, which both strengthens and enhances students’ memory pathways (Tamilselvi & Geetha, 2015). Gardner (2011) helped to expand on the theory that all human brains receive and process information the same way. When the teacher implements several multiple intelligences throughout the lesson, students have the opportunity to gain or build a deeper understanding of content and increase the chances of student comprehension and mastery of the material (Tamilselvi & Geetha, 2015).

Teachers should be mindful while implementing Gardner’s theory in the classroom setting, meaning to keep in mind that students learn in a variety of ways. Students can utilize more than one multiple intelligence to master content. Teachers can create opportunities for students to use multiple intelligences in the elementary classroom by creating different learning stations for students (Campbell, 2018).

Recent studies have shown that teachers can help students master content by tailoring the content to students’ strengths and individual needs (Easley, 2017). Teachers can allow students a
choice in what and how they learn (Abawi, 2015; Easley, 2017). When considering personalized instruction, the teacher as well as the student need to be flexible in not only classroom settings but also groupings that provide different experiences to keep students focused as well as motivated to learn (Deed et al., 2014). Teachers need to analyze the whole child, as social interactions are just as significant as the way the student thinks (Abawi, 2015).

The traditional one size fits all model does not take into account that students learn differently and are academically diverse (Tomberg, Laanpere, Ley, & Normak, 2013). The student’s learning environment is key to student learning (Sahin & Kilsa, 2016; Tomberg et al., 2013). How a student learns is just as crucial as compared to what the student learns (Sahin & Kilsa, 2016; Tomberg et al., 2013). For the teacher to effectively reach students, content must be differentiated to accommodate the diversity amongst students to not only support but also to motivate students to learn (Viness, Colquitt, Pritchard, & Johnson, 2017; Waldrip, Yu, & Prain, 2016). Teachers need to know each student to effectively differentiate lessons by analyzing each students learning profile that includes the student’s learning style (grouping, and mode of presentation) and intelligence preference (Gardner’s multiple intelligences) coupled with the student’s gender and culture (Viness et al., 2017).

**Statement of the Problem**

Currently, in the state of Illinois, over two million students are enrolled in public schools. Despite the implementation of Common Core State Standards, and the application of a new statewide test, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, only 34% of those students are ready for the next academic level (Illinois Report Card, 2018b). When schools do not meet state standards, one possible consequence is placement on a school improvement plan (SIP) with the option of students transferring to a different school in the district.
Current research indicates that general education teachers who implemented personalized instruction met all students’ needs (Abawi, 2015; Jacobs, 2014; Özyurt, Özyurt, Baki, & Güven, 2014). Current research also indicated students became more independent as learning transitioned to a more student-centered approach (Abawi, 2015). Finally, current research indicated administrative, as well as whole school support, is critical when implementing personalized instruction (Abawi, 2015; Jacobs, 2014). A review of the current research identified a failure to reveal how the students’ needs were met in the classroom, what teachers did to help students become independent during this process and what supports were needed to implement personalized instruction at the school successfully (Abawi, 2015; Bahçeci & Gürol, 2016; Farrokh, 2017; Jacobs, 2014; Nagle & Taylor, 2016; Özyurt et al., 2014). Quantitative researchers have conducted studies regarding personalized instruction in the classroom setting and have exposed a lack of clear definition of personalized instruction (Horn, 2017). However, few qualitative studies have explored and described in detail the essence of the daily lived experiences of both general and special education teachers implementing personalized learning in the elementary classroom setting and how those lived experiences may influence their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized instruction.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the essence of the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers who have taught or who are currently implementing personalized instruction. The study also explored how those lived experiences have influenced their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction. Yang, Hwang, and Yang (2013), Deed et al. (2014), Abawi (2015), and Nagle and Taylor (2016) conducted research that documented both positive and negative attitudes and beliefs that
educators have towards personalized instruction. There is little research that documents the essence of the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers who have taught or are currently implementing personalized instruction at the elementary level. This study holds the potential to help fill the existing gap regarding the understanding of those daily lived experiences of general and special education teachers. This study also holds the potential to reveal how the daily lived experiences of general and special education teachers have shaped the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward personalized instruction.

**Research Questions**

1. How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?
2. How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?
3. What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?

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

**Rationale**

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, and unlike quantitative data that breaks data down into numbers, qualitative data seeks to understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Madrigal & McClain, 2012). This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to answer research questions that explained the essence of the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers as it pertained to personalized learning. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to ask the participants interview questions that helped answer the study’s research questions while observing the emotions from the participants as the participants described those
experiences in detail. Qualitative researchers gain firsthand knowledge through data collection tools such as interviewing, observing, surveys, and focus groups that gives the researcher rich data that describes human behavior and emotions in which quantitative data cannot (Creswell, 2014; Madrigal & McClain, 2012).

Phenomenology, as Trace (2017) explained, “decrees that there is both the real object located in space and time and the object as experienced” (p. 6). When the phenomenon presents itself, it presents its essence (Trace, 2017). Therefore objects are experienced and given meaning as essences (Trace, 2017). Knowing the essence of something is said to occur through intuition (Trace, 2017). One does not derive the essence of an object from careful observations through the notion of intuition (Trace, 2017). Instead, the understanding of the essence is understood and occurs naturally, instantly, and intuitively (Trace, 2017). According to Trace (2017) “essences are not senses or meanings but features of the theory intended” (p. 8). Essences are a phenomenon’s style and way of being and can be found through eidetic reduction (Trace, 2017). During this process, the researcher set aside any wonderings of the ontological status of an object and focus on breaking down the essential, necessary, and invariant features that make something an essence of a particular phenomenon (Trace, 2017).

Relevance

Although several studies have been performed to analyze personalized learning, a review of the methodological issues found qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods were used to explore the phenomenon of personalized instruction. The least utilized study approach was mixed methods, followed by several forms of qualitative research, while the highest collection method utilized was quantitative research.
The quantitative studies provided data that was analyzed to determine if different manipulated variables made a difference when it came to personalized instruction. When researchers take into consideration perceptions and beliefs, qualitative data gives the researcher an in-depth view of what stakeholders like or dislike about a particular phenomenon. The researcher has the opportunity not to have to rely on only one source of data but can collect several forms including observations, interviews, as well as school artifacts, which helps the researcher triangulate the data (Creswell, 2013). A gap in the research finds that there is no clear definition of personalized instruction as each study had a different viewpoint on how personalized instruction works or looks when implemented in the elementary classroom.

**The Significance of the Study**

The significance of a study considers the contributions of the study to the practice of the study, in this case, the field of education. Research is vital to the economic and social development of the world’s society, which forms the foundation of policies around the world (University of Skovde, 2016). Currently, most research regarding personalized instruction reflects quantitative approaches. For example, Farrokh (2017) completed a quantitative study on social-personalized versus computer-personalized methods to teach English learners’ reading comprehension. Also, Yang et al.’s (2013) development of an adaptive learning system with multiple perspectives based on students’ learning styles and cognitive styles study. Finally, Bahçeci and Gürol’s (2016) effect of individualized instruction system on the academic achievement scores of students studies, to name a few. The majority of these studies only looked at academic gains from students when personalized instruction was implemented utilizing digital programs. Although these studies are valuable to the field of education, a gap in the literature exists as few studies have documented the lived experiences of general and special education
teachers who teach at the elementary level and how those lived experiences possibly shaped their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized instruction. Also, this study will add to the body of literature that has examined the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals who are critical stakeholders in the implementation of personalized instruction in the elementary school setting.

Concerning the field of education, by exploring the attitudes and beliefs of general and special education teachers in regards to personalized learning by way of their lived experiences, higher stakeholders may develop an interest which could cause professional development opportunities for teachers across the world to teach students with a personalized learning approach. High-quality teaching has become the most important school-level factor for student achievement which has turned the focus of attention on educating teachers from the beginning of the teacher’s career to ongoing professional development (RSA, 2014). The results from this study could also assist educational policymakers in the creation of a comprehensive, personalized learning model across the country when educating students in both the general and special education classrooms. The knowledge gained by research becomes the basis for sustainable development. This knowledge can convert into an application, which could result in widespread benefits (University of Skovde, 2016). For education stakeholders to make informed decisions, stakeholders must understand the effects of the different features of the educational system (Gardner, 1983).

**Definition of Terms**

*Essence*: An essence is a structure of essential meanings that analyze and develop an idea or principle in detail as it pertains to a phenomenon of interest (Dahlberg, 2006).

*Flexibility*: This term is a thinking skill that allows individuals to adapt to changes that are most suitable to fit an individual’s needs is flexibility (The Gadget, 2019).
*General education teacher:* A general education teacher is a teacher who develops and plans lessons, monitors and evaluates the progress of all learners, and works closely with the special education teacher to make the necessary modifications and accommodations to meet the needs of all students (Project IDEAL, 2013).

*Personalized learning:* Personalized learning allows the student to receive instruction based on what and how the student learns (Yang et al., 2013).

*Self-efficacy:* The quality is an individual’s belief in one’s capacity to implement the necessary behaviors to complete a task is self-efficacy (American Psychological Association, 2018).

*Special education teacher:* A special education teacher is a teacher who may have a self-contained classroom or a teacher who provides supports in a resource room. The special education teacher may team up with the general education teacher to help serve students with special needs in the inclusion classroom (Masters in Special Education Program Guide, 2018).

*Student-centered-learning:* This concept is when the learner becomes the center of the learning process by not only choosing what to learn but also why and how is student-centered-learning (American Institutes for Research, 2010).

**Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

**Assumptions**

The qualitative researcher attempts to uncover a phenomenon in a participant’s natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This phenomenological study focused on teachers’ attitudes and beliefs of personalized instruction through interviews and reflective journaling. The researcher assumed that participants were willing to participate in the study, as participants were asked to volunteer. Since this study focused on the participants’ insight and perspective, the researcher believed that
participants would answer the study’s research questions to the best of the participants’ professional ability.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study (Simon, 2011). This study included general and special education teachers who have experienced personalized instruction in the elementary school setting. The site selection reflected the following criterion. Prior professional connections allowed the researcher access to collect data in the district. The researcher also had an interest in understanding personalized instruction due to the district’s academic plan to close the achievement gap for students in the district in comparison to schools in the surrounding neighborhoods. Finally, the researcher was interested in helping teachers improve the achievement of students as teachers learn to modify current pedagogies that are more efficient in closing student achievement gaps. The study only used participants who were elementary school teachers. The study also only collected data in the 2018–2019 school year. Finally, the study occurred in a district previously employed by the researcher.

**Limitations**

Limitations of a study are related to the study’s research design. Qualitative research has several limitations: The quality of the study is dependent on the skill level of the researcher as well as the influence of the researcher’s biases, the volume of data is time-consuming, and the presence of the researcher during data collection can affect the participant’s responses (Anderson, 2010). Another limitation of this study was finding a diverse group of participants to show variance in the data.
Another potential limitation of this phenomenological study related to the fact that the researcher was the sole person collecting and analyzing data. Member checking occurred as the researcher used the participant’s responses from interview questions and journal entries to write a summary in which the researcher gave each participant an opportunity to review for accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking allowed the researcher to increase the reliability and validity of the results and to reduce bias (Harper & Cole, 2012). The transcendental phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to describe one’s own experiences with the phenomenon to enable the researcher to set aside pre judgments and view the phenomenon with a fresh set of eyes, which also reduced the researcher’s biases (Moustakas, 1994).

**Chapter 1 Summary**

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the study by including the background information as well as the historical development of personalized instruction. This chapter also included the study’s problem statement as well as the purpose for the study, the study’s research questions, the methodology for the study, key terms that the reader will see throughout the study, and the assumptions, limitations, and significance of the study.

Despite the implementation of Common Core State Standards, and the application of a new statewide test, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, also known as PARCC, academic preparedness remains a factor for less than 50% of students in Illinois Public Schools (Chicago Public Schools, 2017). This problem has negatively affected students as teachers teach to a one-size fit all model.

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the attitudes and beliefs of both general and special education teachers’ lived experiences, as well as a thorough reflection and
analysis of the researcher’s experiences with the phenomenon of personalized instruction. This study also holds the potential to reveal how the daily lived experiences of general and special education teachers have shaped the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward personalized instruction.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Topic

The Chicago Board of Education is one of the biggest school districts in the state of Illinois, yet data from the 2016–2017 school year revealed that only 29% of the students were college-ready when compared to the state’s average of 51% (Illinois Report Card, 2018a). The state of Illinois uses the data from the state’s mandated test for school ratings and teacher evaluations (Kunichoff, 2018). Illinois places every public school in Illinois into one of four categories based upon the scores from the annual PARCC mandated test (Kunichoff, 2018). Nearly half of Chicago Public Schools failed to meet the state’s standards, with almost all of the low performing schools being in Chicago’s most impoverished areas according to census records (Kunichoff, 2018). Teachers are feeling the pressure to teach to the state’s mandated tests (Johnsen, 2016). As a result of the students’ deficiencies, the state of Illinois has implemented intervention plans to help raise these low performing schools’ achievement levels (Kunichoff, 2018).

Context

Over time, schools have transitioned from the outdated factory model to grouping students by age and grade (Burke and Fried, 2015). However, the pedagogy of teaching students the same subjects, in the same manner, and at the same pace still exists in most schools across the world (Burke and Fried, 2015). This instructional model has been ineffective as K–12 administrators and teachers struggle to meet all students’ needs (Burke and Fried, 2015). However, new technologies available today are empowering schools to implement this form of education in a way, never before possible (Kerns, 2013).
K–12 Schools across the U.S. and Canada face many obstacles that have caused some schools to rely on a personalized instructional model supported by technology to help support student achievement (Burke & Fried, 2015). The concept of personalized learning is not new as it was introduced over 40 years ago and focuses on teaching students content at the student’s pace, abilities, and interest (Heathers, 1977). New technologies available today are empowering schools to implement personalized instruction more efficiently than when introduced over 40 years ago (Kerns, 2013).

**Organization**

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the history of education as well as the background information of some key individuals as it pertains to teaching pedagogies. This information is fundamental to this study because as society becomes more technology-dependent, the 21st-century student has evolved, and education has also transitioned to incorporate technology in and out of the classroom. Furthermore, literature, which discusses the attitudes and beliefs of educators in regards to personalized instruction, will be recounted. A synopsis will encompass a review of the principal themes and limitations found in the literature review. Chapter 2 will end with a discussion of studies where the main focus was personalized instruction and the need for supplemental research concerning the lived experiences of teachers who have implemented personalized instruction.

Finally, with so many different views on how personalized learning looks, educators need an accurate definition and training to effectively move towards a more student-centered approach to learning (Horn, 2017; Johnsen, 2016). This chapter will take a more in-depth look at the theory of personalized instruction. Easley (2017) thought that personalized instruction meant students had a choice and voice, while Kerns’ (2013) definition included the adaptability of
content. By combining the different viewpoints from previous research, one may be able to close a gap in the research of how well-personalized learning benefits all students.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences**

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012) “A conceptual framework is about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous” (p. 7). As indicated in Chapter 1, this study explored the phenomenon known as personalized instruction. To provide some background information on personalized instruction, the conceptual framework of this study used the work of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. Gardner (2011) suggested that there are nine multiple human intelligences: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential.

Gardner (1983) described the traditional classroom as having a teacher that talks and presents abstract information to students using inanimate objects to convey content. Individuals use Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory to make sense of information once it is taken in, making the intelligences more of a computational system (Davis, Christodoulou, Seider, & Gardner, 2011). Gardner (2011) suggested that individuals possess all eight intelligences in different strengths. Students are given multiple vantage points to make sense of this information when teachers present content in a variety of ways using the intelligences as individuals can utilize several intelligences personalizing the information for students (Davis et al., 2011). Gardner (1983) noted, “In the case of each individual, those charged with educational planning must decide which means can best be mobilized to help that individual attain the desired competency, or skill” (p. 407).
Analyses of the Current Theoretical Perspective in the Literature

A primary goal for the teacher is that of student mastery of content. The teacher can achieve this goal by tailoring lessons to students’ strengths while giving the student a choice in how the student learns (Easley, 2017). Deed et al. (2014) referred to this type of personalized learning as open classrooms in which pedagogy evolved in the mid to late 1900s where students were given a choice of activities to motivate student learning, paired with flexibility in classroom space and group settings (one-on-one, small, or whole group instruction). Abawi (2015) referred to Vygotsky’s philosophy when the focus is personalized learning; To teach students, the teacher must analyze not only the students’ way of thinking but also the way the student interacts socially as this is a crucial component to higher cognitive functions.

As Gardner (2011) suggested, there are several pathways that students can take in and retain information. Nagle and Taylor’s (2016) framework also indicated that there are several pathways in which students learn. For Nagle and Taylor (2016), personalized learning revolves around the student as the student becomes more in charge of the learning that takes place and learning transitions beyond the classroom as learning opportunities are everywhere the student travels. Teachers can personalize instruction for individual students through content, structure, and presentation, as each student is unique in the way that the student learns (Campbell, 2018; Chen-Wei & Chen, 2016). The above research further supports the need to gather data to support personalized instruction as education has evolved throughout history.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

This section will document the history of education and the significant changes that have occurred from past to present. The purpose of this section is to inform the reader of how school has evolved from all male students to a more diverse and inclusive structure of learning. It will
highlight how the development of education has to model how progressive education has become thus the pedagogy of teaching must reflect this change.

**History of Teacher Education**

According to Sass (2018), the Puritans arrived at Cape Cod, where the religious beliefs of the Puritans came to dominate education in the New England colonies. This around the 1620’s where the average student was a White male being taught religion (Sass, 2018). The first free school in Virginia opened in 1635, but children were usually tutored in the home by parents or tutors (Sass, 2018). In 1642, the Massachusetts Bay School Law was passed, and all homes were required to teach children principles of religion and capital laws of the Commonwealth (Sass, 2018). During these times, subject areas taught focused more on religion and law.

The Old Deluder Satan Act passed in 1647 stating that all towns with at least 50 families hire a schoolmaster to teach reading and writing to the students. This Act also required towns with at least 100 families to hire a schoolmaster to teach Latin to prepare students for Harvard University (Sass, 2018). This is when education took a turn from religion to essential reading and writing as students were being groomed to take classes at Harvard University. Education becomes a function of the state in 1791 and in 1827 Massachusetts passed a law that required towns of 500 families to open a public high school for students (Sass, 2018).

Changes in education continued to evolve when Horace Mann became secretary of the state board of education in the state of Massachusetts (Sass, 2018). Mann worked to increase funding for public schools with better training for teachers (Sass, 2018). From 1837 to 1856 that work helped find the first kindergarten (Sass, 2018). The Land Grant Act became a law, which donated public land to states for public college use in 1862 (Sass, 2018). In support of this, the 1875 Civil Rights Act banned segregation in all public accommodations (Sass, 2018). Due to
this, the Second Morrill Act passed in 1890, that led to the opening of 16 historically Black colleges (Sass, 2018). After World War II, many students as well as teachers enlisted in the military but the G.I. Bill of Rights was signed (Sass, 2018). As a result, more than 2 million servicemen enrolled in college, which changed the tradition of higher education from being only for the wealthy (Sass, 2018).

The history of education started the foundation of accountability for students to receive equal and high quality education. In 2001 the No Child Left Behind Act was approved that held schools accountable for ensuring that students not only received high quality education but set high standard measurable goals for the school (Sass, 2018). If schools did not meet these goals, they ran the risk of closing. For example, in 2013, the Chicago Board of Education voted to close 50 schools, affecting over 1,000 teachers (Sass, 2018).

Former President Barack Obama signed the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act and gave individual states more control over standards and measurable goals (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.) The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives the responsibility to each state to develop a plan for support as well as accountability to ensure that every student is on the path to college and careers (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). As the history of education evolved, teaching pedagogies also changed, which may have a direct effect on student achievement.

Teaching Pedagogical Practices

**Inquiry-based learning.** In 1960, Joseph Schwab helped to introduce inquiry-based learning to the educational field (Pappas, 2014b). During this period in education, students had the opportunity to learn through investigation as opposed to rote memorization as students were able to ask and investigate questions for a deeper understanding (Pappas, 2014b). Confirmation,
structured, guided, and open inquiries are four forms used for inquiry-based learning (Pappas, 2014b).

It is through confirmation inquiry that students investigate a question that has a definite answer, and the student studies to validate the predicted results (Pappas, 2014b). Structured inquiry involves giving students a problem and method of achieving, but the goal is for the student to explain evidence achieved through investigating (Pappas, 2014b). Through guided inquiry, students investigate a given question, and then the student can design how the investigation will take place (Pappas, 2014b). Finally, there is an open inquiry where the learner is in charge of the entire study from the question to findings from the investigation (Pappas, 2014b).

Lastly, with inquiry-based learning, the student is in charge of the learning by giving students and teachers a choice of what inquiry path the student will follow based on learning abilities (Pappas, 2014b). This learning style provides the learner with more ownership in their learning, and the student has a choice in the manner of how information is acquired and obtained, which directly connects with personalized learning.

**The Keller Plan.** Fred Keller, along with other researchers and theorists, introduced the individualized learning model in the 1960s (Pappas, 2014a). Through individualized instruction, the student receives instruction based on the individual student’s needs (Pappas, 2014a). Keller’s plan of education revolved around four principles: each learner should complete all work individually at the learner’s pace, the learner should be assessed to determine mastery of content, learners are encouraged to learn through written materials, and the educator should be utilized as a guide (Pappas, 2014a). Although the student is encouraged to be in charge of their learning, the teacher must also know the students’ abilities.
There have been several studies conducted on the subject of individualized learning. Researchers have utilized different forms of research to assert claims that individualized learning has a direct effect on student achievement. The results of the study were analyzed, and the results are below.

**Analysis of the Research**

**Quantitative Research**

In order to create a general understanding on how the implementation of personalized learning over the more traditional methods of practice works, quantitative research was conducted as a means to collect data through numbers from many research practices. Farrokh (2017) conducted a quantitative research study to determine if students would learn English better through a personalized learning approach over the traditional learning method. There were 90 students randomly grouped into three groups: the control group received the conventional mode of teaching, experimental group one received personalized instruction, and experimental group two received personalized instruction paired with a digital assisted learning program. The results from the control group increased from a 5.05 mean score to a 6.75 mean score. The results for the experimental group one also improved with a mean score of 5.2 from the pretest to a mean score of 7.6 on the posttest. The results from experimental group two also increased with a mean score of 4.5 from the pretest to a mean score of 8 on the posttest. Although there was achievement growth in all three groups that participated in the study, students who received general personalized instruction paired with a computer-assisted language system had the most growth of 3.5 points from pretest to posttest. Students who received general personalized instruction grew by 2.4 points from pretest to posttest, and students who received traditional instruction grew by 1.7 points from pretest to posttest.
Likewise, Yang et al. (2013) conducted quantitative research by randomly assigning 54 students into two groups. The experimental group received personalized instruction through an adaptive computer interface system, while the control group received instruction through a conventional model. The researchers claimed that students would achieve higher academically with the implementation of personalized learning. Yang et al. (2013) claimed when students are interested in the content, as well as the material fitting the student’s needs; students would achieve higher academically than the traditional teaching method. The results showed that the experimental group’s scores increased from an average of 80.33 to an average of 84.85 from pretest to posttest. The results from the control group increased from an average of 74.38 to an average of 77.34 from pretest to posttest. In comparison, the experimental group’s scores increased by 1.56 more points than the control group.

Waldrip et al. (2014) also conducted quantitative research through the use of questionnaires to gauge how students would feel about receiving instruction through a more personalized approach. This study consisted of two trials. The first trial included 220 students from two different high schools who were academically low and from low socioeconomic status. The students from the first trial helped the researchers eliminate some of the scales utilized in the second trial as it took too much time for students to answer all questions from the questionnaire in one class period. The second trial consisted of 2,407 students from 4 different schools. The students from the second trial answered a 66-item questionnaire with 19 scales. The results of the study found that students would prefer a more personalized learning approach (Waldrip et al., 2014).

Also, Bahçeci and Gürol (2016) completed a quantitative experimental study where the researchers claimed that individualized learning could be successful if paired with traditional
learning. There were two groups for this eight-week study in which the experimental group received personalized instruction through a computer portal paired with traditional learning, and the control group received instruction through the conventional mode of learning. Students received both a pretest and a posttest for analysis. Students in the experimental group’s mean scores were 29.28 on the pretest and 36.25 on the posttest. The control group’s mean scores were 28.92 on the pretest and 33.14 on the posttest. The difference between post scores for both groups was a difference of 3.11 points in favor of personalized learning paired with traditional learning (Bahçeci and Gürol, 2016).

Each quantitative study, Bahçeci, and Gürol (2016), Farrokh (2017), Waldrip et al. (2014) and, Yang et al. (2013), showed an improvement in test scores when students received some form of personalized instruction, but there was no consistency as to the kind of personalized instruction across each study. Students received personalized instruction with computer software, but the study did not describe how the computer software functioned so that students received personalized learning utilizing the software. There was also a gap in the research that failed to describe the lived experiences of the teachers who implemented personalized instruction and how those experiences impacted the teacher’s attitudes and beliefs towards the phenomenon.

**Mixed Methods Research**

The intentional use of combining qualitative and quantitative research for is to ensure a more polished, and confident outcome, or conclusion. In research experiments, or studies where there are multiple research questions, mix methods research is used to not only help answer those questions, but strengthen the amount of findings. Jacobs (2014) conducted a mixed methods study that interviewed teachers, and students’ state reading test scores were analyzed as students
received personalized instruction in five different pilot schools. Students benefitted from a more personalized approach to teaching as the first school’s reading scores increased by 28%, the second school’s reading scores increased by 18%, the third schools reading scores increased by 17%, the fourth school’s reading scores increased by 10% and the last school’s reading scores increased by 5% (Jacobs, 2014). The results from the study concluded teachers overlook top-tiered students when using a one-size-fits-all model for instruction. All middle school students received personalized instruction with no control group and data was derived from the students’ state reading test scores.

Since this study did not use a control group, it is difficult to conclude that personalized instruction caused an increase in test scores or if other factors contributed to the rise in student test scores (Jacobs, 2014). Across the schools used for this study, teachers utilized many different learning programs, including Achieve3000, i-Ready, Khan Academy, and iPass, to name a few. Each program becomes a separate variable, making it hard for teachers to replicate with the expectancy to achieve the same results.

Although student scores increased based on state data, what the research failed to reveal was how the lived experiences of the teachers who implemented personalized learning shaped the teacher’s attitudes and beliefs towards the phenomenon (Jacobs, 2014). The study also was unable to reveal the overall essence of the lived experiences of these teachers when it comes to the phenomenon of personalized instruction. Finally, the study did not disclose how teachers implemented personalized instruction for students that helped student scores to increase.

Qualitative Research

In order to create a complete picture of how the implementation of personalized learning over the more traditional methods of practice works, qualitative research was also conducted as a
means to observe the phenomena from individuals who lived through the experiences of personalized learning. Abawi (2015) conducted a refractive phenomenological case study focusing on independent learners using personalized instruction. Abawi (2015) claimed that the educational system’s one size fits all mentality needs to shift to meet the needs of all students. There were 12 teachers, 12 parents, two teacher aides, four external staff members, and 10 students interviewed for this study. The teachers interviewed all implemented personalized instruction daily in the classroom. The study found that when implementing personalized instruction, teachers set high expectations with flexible structures (Abawi, 2015). The study also found that teachers pushed for student independence while providing positive supports for students (Abawi, 2015). Finally, the administration supported teachers throughout the process. The administration also equipped teachers with everything the teacher felt was necessary to implement personalized instruction successfully (Abawi, 2015).

Additionally, Deed et al. (2014) conducted a case study with one junior college classroom for over 10 weeks. The researcher interviewed the teacher twice and observed students at the school setting over the 10 weeks. The researchers claimed that if students had more flexible settings, paired with personalized learning opportunities, students would be able to be more independent workers (Deed et al., 2014). It was the teacher’s responsibility to create an environment that supported student independence while also managing differentiation to make lessons purposeful and engaging for students. Students became more independent while having to adapt to becoming problem solvers because the learning shifted to a more student-centered approach as the teachers’ role changed to only assist students for successful completion of different tasks (Deed et al., 2014).
Similarly, Özyurt et al. (2014) conducted a case study in which gifted middle school students utilized adaptive e-learning computer software. The study collected qualitative data that focused on the student’s learning style. The study found that when students were not taught using one of the student’s preferred learning styles, it became more difficult for the student to learn, students were not focused, and learning seemed unattainable (Özyurt et al., 2014). The study also found that students felt that learning through one’s preferred learning style be beneficial (Özyurt et al., 2014). A student may have different learning styles based on the subject area or may benefit from more than one learning style. This study revealed that students preferred, and teachers agreed that it was beneficial for students to switch between learning styles (Özyurt et al., 2014). This study supports the use of Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligence as the conceptual framework for this study as Gardner identified that multiple intelligences work together and students have strengths in more than one area (Campbell, 2018).

Teacher’s Attitudes and Beliefs about Personalized Instruction as Analyzed from Qualitative Research

Meeting the Needs of All Students

Differentiation causes students to make individual learning goals. Some students struggle while other students flourish, but students love independence while learning on the student’s academic level (Abawi, 2015). Time becomes a factor when trying to meet the demands of all students who are not all on the same educational level (Jacobs, 2014). Although beneficial, the implementation of personalized learning can be very overwhelming if teachers are not adequately prepared or trained (Jacobs, 2014; Özyurt et al., 2014). Data could be used to group students who are academically on the same level, increasing student engagement (Jacobs, 2014).
Teaching Students to Become Independent Learners

Personalized learning promotes students to become more independent. When implemented, the entire pedagogy of the classroom shifts, as students learn that attainment becomes more challenging. Students are put in uncomfortable positions and must learn to adjust as the teacher guides the student through differentiated lessons (Abawi, 2015; Jacobs, 2014). The student must go through different steps before the teacher becomes involved in helping the complete student tasks which can be challenging for the teacher to watch but is necessary for the shift in learning to take place (Abawi, 2015)

Support is Critical

Personalized learning requires support through administration as well as resources (Abawi, 2015). The administration should maintain constant communication with teachers as the teacher has first-hand knowledge of what supports are needed in the classroom to implement personalized instruction effectively (Abawi, 2015). The entire school should be on one accord if the school is shifting to a personalized approach model so that the responsibility does not rest on the teachers in the building. Just like students will struggle to become independent learners with lessons that are differentiated, teachers will strive to differentiate lessons. As a result, having the support of the entire school will help teachers feel more comfortable throughout the process (Abawi, 2015).

After analyzing the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction, the teacher met all student’s needs when implementing personalized instruction; students became more independent as learning transitioned to a more student-centered approach, and support is critical when implementing personalized instruction (Abawi, 2015; Deed et al., 2014; Jacobs, 2014; Özyurt et al., 2014). What the data failed to reveal was how the students’ needs were met
in the classroom, what teachers did to help students become independent during this process and what supports were needed to implement personalized instruction at the school. There are still no clearly defined roles or strategies revealed from the data of what personalized learning looks like in the elementary classroom, thus identifying a gap in research.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

An examination of the reviewed literature for this study revealed several issues surrounding the current research on personalized learning. The potential problems found while examining prior research include issues of reliability, replication, generalizability, and research design. Most studies utilized a quantitative methodology. Each study’s approach was different from this data collection method, but methodological issues were present in several of the studies.

**Reliability**

Reliability in research is a way of measuring the quality of the data collection procedures to ensure the results from the study are valid (Lund Research, 2012b). Jacobs’s (2014) mixed method research study not only interviewed teachers and students on personalized instruction, but the study also looked at the students’ statewide reading scores. No control group received traditional instruction, so there was no group to compare data to report that personalized instruction was effective. The study explained that students received personalized learning time in which the student worked on academic content through project-based learning by choosing the student’s preferred digital tools. Although students showed improvement in test scores as the school transitioned the teaching pedagogy to a student-centered personalized learning approach, there was no control group to compare academic results questioning the study’s reliability of the data.
Next, Chen-Wei and Chen’s (2016) quantitative empirical study customization and personalization in the context of handheld devices utilized several forms of data to validate claims. Students from the National Central University in Taiwan answered preference questionnaires, task sheets, as well as a pretest and a posttest (Chen-Wei & Chen, 2016). Several studies used the student preference questionnaire, and the task sheets were 15 factual questions used to reduce bias (Chen-Wei & Chen, 2016). Limitations still existed; this work only used a small-scaled sample of 60 participants, which fits into the generalizability category as well.

**Replication**

Replicating a study validates research as being accurate and applicable to the research world (Enago Academy, 2018). Farrokh’s (2017) quantitative approach to digital personalized learning seemed to mirror several studies that were conducted to explore digital learning versus traditional modes of learning. For example, Farrokh (2017) made a study comparison to Rezvani and Ketabi (2011), who found that web-based materials increased student’s mastery of grammar.

Abawi’s (2015) qualitative data yielded favorable results from both students and teachers as the entire school implemented personalized learning. However, this is not the first year of implementing personalized learning at the case study’s school, and strong support systems are in place from the administration. With so much supports at the teacher’s and student’s disposal, teachers are not afraid of taking risks and asking for help when needed. The same supports and systems would have to be in place to replicate this study (Abawi, 2015).

Additionally, Nagle and Taylor’s (2016) qualitative research on the effectiveness of personalized learning in the middle school grades collected several forms of data. The researchers gathered data for two years from interviews, observations, field notes from planning meetings, student work samples, and student surveys. However, the students utilized for this
study were from a school that is predominately White (86%) and from wealthy families. The demographic makeup would need to be similar to replicate this study as different results may vary depending on demographics.

Finally, there were also replication issues in Pane, Steiner, Baird, and Hamilton’s (2017) mixed-method study focused on student achievement after implementing personalized learning. Although the study found through the use of statewide testing data that student learning increased over a two-year research period in 62 charter schools, the study also found that teacher implementation of personalized learning varied from school to school through interviews and observations. This study would be difficult to replicate, as there was no consistency from school to school about what personalized learning looked like in the classroom setting.

**Generalizability**

Generalizability refers to how useful the results of a study are to a much broader population of people (Hydrocephalus Association, 2018). Yang et al.’s (2013) quantitative research that utilized an adaptive computer interface system to prove that student learning would increase as a direct result of a more personalized approach. The study sample included students from a computer science department that had prior knowledge of working with computers, which may have a direct effect on the data for students who are not as knowledgeable about working with computers. The sample size also was not significant, utilizing only 54 students, and therefore the findings could not be inferred to general cases. This study also focused on cognitive and learning styles while other factors were not considered, such as knowledge of the students and difficulty levels of the learning material (Yang et al., 2013).

Aviles and Eastman’s (2012) quantitative study examined technological tools and online learning management systems to improve the educational performance of millennial students.
This study used students between the ages of 18–30 to complete a survey that questioned which technological tools the students used daily. Although the researchers collected 229 surveys, only 227 were deemed usable for data analysis. The researchers reported several limitations to this study. First, the study just measured self-reported use and perceptions of effectiveness while there was no data collected to measure levels of efficiency. Secondly, the study only used business students, which may cause data to be different for students in various fields of study. Finally, the researcher did not collect data from teachers of how useful the tech tools were for the success of students in the classroom.

Also, Yang et al.’s (2013) quantitative research sample size were not significant, and therefore the findings could not be inferred to general cases. The study utilized an adaptive computer interface system, with students from a computer science department. Students from a general population class might not be as advanced as the students from this study so the results may not be consistent with the study’s findings.

Swan et al.’s (2015) qualitative case study on virtual learning labs for personalized learning also had limitations. Although there were several forms of data collected in the way of observations, focus groups, and interviews, because this case study focused on one school and a single instance of a virtual learning lab, there is the issue of generalizability. The researchers could have avoided this by including other stakeholders in the research.

**Synthesis of Research Findings**

A combination of the research findings from the literature found that not all students learn at the same pace or the same way. The research also reflected that when students learned in a more personalized approach, there was an increase in student achievement. Johnsen (2016) said, “Differentiating, personalized learning, individualizing, customizing, tailoring, adapting,
and accommodating are just some of the terms that have been used in the past and present that describe models that address each student’s strengths, needs, and interests” (p. 73). While the majority of the research was quantitative, the results from the data revealed that students that utilized personalized instruction outperformed students who received traditional instruction. The qualitative data also showed that students, as well as teachers, favored personalized instruction.

Another theme found in the literature was there was no distinct definition when it came to personalized instruction (Jacobs, 2014). Although each study researched focused on personalized instruction, each study had a different meaning of personalized instruction. The majority of the qualitative studies utilized adaptive computer software based upon the student’s learning style, or preference. No two studies used the same formula to test personalized instruction.

Lastly, the researchers determined that the relationship between student and teacher plays a significant role in the success of students (Abawi, 2015; Deed et al., 2014). The teacher must be able to analyze student data to know each student’s strengths and weaknesses to personalize instruction effectively. Students must also be given a choice in how the material is presented and at the student’s level not only to motivate the student to learn but also to hold the student’s attention.

The concept of personalized instruction was introduced over 40 years ago as a method of teaching in which content, instructional technology, and pace of learning consider the abilities and interests of each learner (Pappas, 2014a). However, new technologies available today are empowering schools to implement this form of education in a way never before possible (Kerns, 2013). Education has begun to research and shift the teaching pedagogy from a more teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach.
Critique of Previous Research

This review of the literature reflects several methodologies that examined personalized instruction. The quantitative research used surveys, questionnaires, and pre and posttests, while the qualitative research included the student as well as teacher interviews.

For example, Farrokh’s (2017) experimental quantitative research study asserted a student who received a more personalized approach to learning would have a more positive effect on EFL learners. This study randomly grouped 90 students into three groups: two experimental groups and a control group. The control group received learning to use the traditional learning method, the first experimental group received personalized instruction, and the second experimental group received instruction paired with a computer-assisted language program. All students completed a pretest and posttest following treatment. The results concluded that students who received personalized instruction paired with the computer-assisted language program outscored the experimental group who received only personalized instruction and the control group.

The experimental group who received personalized instruction outscored the students in the control group. However, having more than one manipulated variable during this study questions the validity of an actual experimental study where one group usually receives treatment while another group does not (Creswell, 2014). One can challenge the internal validity of this study as both variables (personalized instruction and the computer-assisted language program) were worked simultaneously, causing the variables to become confounding variables (Lund Research, 2012a). There is no way to determine which variable caused an increase in student scores. During the experiment, the two variables competed with each other instead of being manipulated individually. Although both experimental groups received personalized
instruction, one might question if the experimental group who had two manipulated variables would be different if the students solely received instruction with the computer-assisted language program.

Dabbagh and Fake’s (2017) mixed-method study collected data from 109 college students who answered questions through a blog post on wordpress.org about one’s perception of personalized learning environments (PLEs). Dabbagh and Fake (2017) described PLEs as digital spaces that allow students to be in control of one’s own learning and development. Students answered five questions to help the researcher best understand what digital devices and technologies the students found most useful in creating the best digital learning experiences. The purpose of utilizing this information was to inform the researcher of what social media technologies were most helpful when creating PLEs that are productive and personalized for students. The researcher analyzed students’ blog posts for themes (qualitative) as well as frequency counts when different computer hardware or software tools were mentioned (quantitative).

Dabbagh and Fake (2017) asked students, “Who are you and what do you like to learn about” (p. 30). The study found that students were interested in learning about social issues: 16 students favored social work while 19 students favored child development, 42 students connected with student status, and 20 students mentioned the students’ concentration of study. Twenty-five students identified with one’s student status and work roles. This question was general, so there was a student who chose not to answer the question while some students had multiple responses. Although there were students, who had multiple responses to the general question, the one student who chose not to answer the question may have flawed the data by
nonresponse bias (Ellis, 2015). Nonresponse bias occurs when a survey does not accurately represent the target group due to the response/nonresponse of the subgroup (Ellis, 2015).

Additionally, Dabbagh and Fake (2017) asked students what hardware did the student most utilize. The results about this question found that 96% of students reported using laptops, 75% utilized smartphones, 33% used tablets, and 16% used desktop computers to learn (Dabbagh and Fake, 2017). Finally, students were asked to describe how might one’s PLE look. The results found that 44% of the students described PLE as a physical space, while 30 students described a PLE as both a physical and digital space. This information was useful as it explained how students would like to learn. This information takes into account a holistic approach to the student, as the environment in which the student learns is just as important as what the student learns. This study only concentrated on the student’s perspective. The perspectives of all stakeholders as it relates to personalized instruction are critical pieces of information that are missing from this study.

Nedungadi and Raman’s (2012) mixed-method research studied personalized instruction through adaptive computer software. Students answered a 27-item questionnaire (qualitative) to assess the students’ attitudes towards the software the students’ perceptions of learning in general and the preference of e-learning (with a computer) or m-learning (with a mobile device). The researcher collected data from student assessments from various science topics on how long it took students to answer questions utilizing the different learning tools (quantitative). There were two experimental groups: The first group used both the e-learning and m-learning tools while experimental group 2 used only the e-learning tools.

The results from the study found that 71% of the students favored m-learning as related to taking control of one’s learning, 76% of the students preferred utilizing computers to learn
over mobile devices because of the larger screen, and 76% of the students found it fun to use mobile devices to learn. The results also found that, on average, students responded faster when utilizing e-learning devices with an average of 14.1 seconds as opposed to m-learning, with an average of 24.3 seconds per question. Although this data was relevant, the questions that students answered for this research revealed how well the students preferred the digital tools and the amount of time it took for a student to answer a question. What the data did not show was mastery of content as related to personalized instruction.

However, not all of the research dealt with personal feelings. For example, Chen-Wei and Chen (2016) conducted two empirical studies to determine how different cognitive styles reacted to the customized digital learning system and personalized digital learning system within a handheld computer. This study gave college participants a study preference questionnaire as well as a task sheet so that students knew what they were to learn from the study. Students were then given a 20 question pretest to determine how much the student knew in their content domain and then a 20 question posttest that scored the student on how much they had gained after using the handheld device. The first study focused on the effects of cognitive styles based on student preference utilizing a customized digital learning system (CDLS). The second study used the results from the first study to analyze the influence of cognitive styles as related to the use of the CDLS and personalized digital learning system (PDSL).

Additionally, the researchers gave students a preference sheet and after answering the questions, grouped the students into two different groups, serialists (26 students) and holists (34 students). According to Chen-Wei and Chen (2016), holist take on a global approach and prefer to have several options available to choose from while multitasking. Serialists prefers to have only the necessary options available while completing one task at a time. The data analyzed the
amount of time it took students to complete a task, task scores, and posttest scores. The data revealed that the average time to complete a task for serialists was, on average, 87.02% while the average time for holists was 71.64%. On average, task scores for serialists were 19.21 and holists were 19.54. Finally, the posttest score averages for serialists were 12.98, and holist postscores were 14.47.

Consequently, students from the second experimental study completed a pretest, and on average, students who utilized the CDLS scores were 9.77 serialists and 9.71 holists. Students who were using the PDLS pretest average scores were 9.83 serialists and 9.94 holists. The data from the second experiment also revealed task time, task scores and posttest scores. Students who used the CDLS scored on average 75.13 task time, 19.77 task score and 14 posttest scores. Students who used the PDLA scored on average 57.67 task time, 19.77 task score and 14.03 posttest score. Students also completed a questionnaire with 15 positive and 15 negative statements as related to CDLS and PDLS that showed no significant difference with student choice to utilizing a customized digital learning system or a personalized digital learning system. There was a mean score for positive perceptions of 3.56 for CDLS and 3.50 for PDLS and a mean score of 2.60 for CDLS and 2.51 for PDLS for negative attitudes.

Chen-Wei and Chen’s (2016) particular study utilized multiple data sources as data was used from the first experiment to complete the second study. Students also completed a study preference sheet, a pretest, a posttest, and a questionnaire. The researchers found that learners who used the PDLS spent significantly less time than the participants who used CDLS (Chen-Wei and Chen, 2016). The results of the study also suggest that cognitive styles are essential when delivering personalized learning (Chen-Wei and Chen, 2016).
Comparatively, Yang et al. (2013) completed a mixed method study that revealed that students who received personalized learning support based upon their learning and cognitive styles outscored students in the control group as both sets of college participants gained the basic knowledge of computer networks in phase one and then differentiated instruction in phase two. Both groups then took a posttest that consisted of 10 true or false questions and 23 multiple choice questions and the results were the experimental group scored a mean score of 84.85 with a 7.32 standard deviation while the control group scored a mean score of 80.33 with a 7.22 standard deviation and an $F$ value of 5.35 (Yang et al., 2013). What is missing from the research is the perceptions of what, how, and why implementing personalized instruction improves mastery of content.

Likewise, Jacobs (2014) also incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research as he performed a case study with teacher interviews and student data collected from pre and posttests. Here, students in Summit Public Schools utilized an online platform for personalized learning using a playlist of activities, instructional videos as well as assessments that students could choose from to learn content. When interviewed, students using individualized learning plans were more in charge of their learning, they knew what content they needed to learn, and they knew what scores were required to be successful. By personalizing instruction for each student, teacher awareness also increased as the teacher became aware of what skills each student needed to master (Jacobs, 2014).

Incorporating both quantitative as well as qualitative research, gives the researcher a more in depth view of personalized instruction. When the researcher can find the strengths and weaknesses within both quantitative and qualitative research, they can choose to incorporate the strengths from both methods to complete a mixed method study. One can argue that by blending
the data, the researcher can develop a much stronger understanding of the research topic (Creswell, 2013).

Concerning different methodologies, the majority of the reviewed studies were quantitative. The quantitative studies were able to give numbers that could be analyzed to determine if the variable made a difference when it came to personalized instruction. Although one of the benefits of collecting quantitative data includes short periods, the amount of data collected by qualitative data is also beneficial. Qualitative data gives the researcher an in depth view of what stakeholders like or dislike as the researcher considers the participants’ perceptions and beliefs. The researcher has the opportunity not to have to rely on only one source of data but can collect several forms, including observations, interviews, as well as school artifacts, which helps the researcher triangulate the data (Creswell, 2013).

Research suggests that the lack of specificity regarding personalized instruction implementation and modeling is why schools experience disparities in how implementation occurs in the classroom (Horn, 2017). This differentiation of implementation across schools will have a direct effect on the replication of the data. Replication is essential not only for the validity of research but also for the application to real-world situations (All Psych, 2018). Hearing from the individuals who are most affected by personalized instruction would help to close the gap in the research as the researcher takes on a qualitative approach to explain the phenomenon of personalized instruction from the viewpoint of the teachers who are responsible for implementation (Creswell, 2013).

Chapter 2 Summary

After a detailed review of the literature, several themes emerged (Bahçeci and Gürol, 2016; Farrokh, 2017; Waldrip et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2013). From such, one major theme was
the plethora of information from quantitative studies had shown that personalized instruction had positive effects on student achievement but that an increased number of qualitative studies would benefit this theory. Another emergent theme in the literature was that there was no clear definition of personalized instruction (Jacobs, 2014). Although each study researched focused on personalized instruction, each study had a different meaning of personalized instruction. The majority of the studies used adaptive computer software based on the student’s learning style or preference, and no two studies used the same formula to test personalized instruction.

This chapter of the review of literature also included the history of education and how education has changed over time from being a place of study for only men for religion to becoming a diverse educational setting as well as educational fields (Sass, 2018). The review of the literature included the transformation of teaching pedagogies, which included several theories from different psychologists as well as theorists. With the introduction of each approach, teaching pedagogies evolved to reflect current research. It is through this research that individualized learning was presented and is still around today in the educational field.

This chapter also included Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory, as this is related to personalized instruction. Howard Gardner (2011) explored the hypothesis that individuals learn differently and teaching should be modified in a way that meets the demands of all students, as education is not a one size fit all model (Strauss, 2013).

Finally, this review of the literature chapter concluded with an analysis of the research literature. The research included similar (Abawi, 2015; Deed et al., 2014; Jacobs, 2014) and different (Bahçeci and Gürol, 2016; Farrokh, 2017; Özyurt et al., 2014; Waldrip et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2013) methodologies that relate to the future transcendental phenomenology study. This study may also provide educators with a clear definition as well as a model of personalized
instruction and how to identify the roles and responsibilities of both the student as well as the educator as it relates to personalized instruction. It is from these conclusions that phenomenology will be the best choice of data collection as the researcher can collect data in the participants’ natural setting, which is the focal point of the future study (Creswell, 2013).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 2 introduced the conceptual framework and research literature foundation for this study. This chapter details the phenomenological design that was chosen to study teachers’ lived experiences and perceptions of personalized instruction in the elementary setting. This chapter introduces the reader to the research in which the researcher feels will best answer the study’s research questions. Chapter 3 also explains the purpose and design of the study, including the research population and sampling method. The chapter describes the instrumentation, data collection, and identification of attributes, data analysis procedures, and limitations of the research design. Finally, the chapter concludes with the validation, expected findings, and ethical issues that are related to the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the general and special education teachers’ lived experiences of personalized instruction. The study examined the teachers’ beliefs based upon their expertise in implementing personalized instruction. I also examined the teachers’ perception of what supports are needed to fully and successfully implement personalized instruction. Through these lived experiences, this study will help to provide a deep analysis of the participants’ lived experiences when implementing personalized instruction in the general education classroom.

Research Questions

1. How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?
2. How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?

3. What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?

**Research Approach and Design**

**Research Approach**

The researcher used a qualitative rather than a quantitative or mixed methods approach for this study. This research study employed a transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach. Qualitative studies seek to explain why and how individuals interpret and make meaning of the individual’s world (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016). During this process, the researcher became the main instrument for data collection and analysis, and the researcher interpreted this data to make sense of the data as it related to a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is vital in the field of education as it relates to personalized instruction. A gap in research has shown that while several studies have shown an improvement in student achievement, without a clear definition of the implementation of personalized instruction in the elementary classroom setting, results will vary (Horn, 2017). The data was analyzed to give a vivid description of what personalized instruction looked like when implemented in the elementary classroom setting (Schmuck, 2017).

The focus of the study was the lived experiences of two different categories of teachers in the educational field who implemented personalized instruction. The first category of teachers that the researcher used for this study was the general education teacher. The general education teacher services students from the general population. The second category of teachers the researcher used for this study included the special education teacher. The special education
teacher serves the community of students with learning disabilities documented in an individualized educational plan (IEP).

The research methodology utilized by the majority of the research from the literature review was quantitative research. This fact led the researcher to believe that qualitative research would be the most suitable choice for answering the study’s research questions due to the gap in the research. Since the focus of this study gathered the different perspectives or viewpoints of different teachers who implemented personalized instruction in the elementary classroom setting to make meaning of the essence of personalized instruction, the study reflects qualitative transcendental phenomenological research.

Phenomenological research aims to describe a specific phenomenon by gathering data from the lived experiences of individuals who have a direct connection to the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). This type of research, which utilized multiple perspectives, explained one’s beliefs and perceptions as the primary source of data that the researcher analyzed as it related to the phenomenon of personalized instruction. This data directly answers the study’s research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

This study focused on individuals made up of a broad range spectrum to validate the acceptance or rejection of the phenomenon of personalized instruction. The phenomenological research also gave the researcher the ability to collect the ideas and perceptions of the participants with adding little to no commentary as possible, which makes this data collection method more suitable for answering the researcher’s research questions.

Other examples of qualitative research include narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Narrative research involves collaboration between the researcher and participants that only tells the story of one or two individuals (Creswell, 2013; Schmuck,
While this research is beneficial, data would be limited as the researcher would not be able to generalize the data from utilizing only one or two individuals. Grounded theory focuses on the researcher developing a theory as it relates to a particular environment. There are many different environments as well as social classes in the educational field. Only focusing on one specific environment would only benefit individuals that would mirror that particular environment in grounded theory. Ethnography focuses on an entire culture’s social interactions within a group setting (Schmuck, 2017). This study focused on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers implementing personalized instruction in the elementary classroom setting, not social interactions within the elementary classroom setting. Finally, case studies involve the researcher trying to reveal the why and how of particular concern or issue while phenomenology focuses on similar themes that individuals have in common through lived experiences with a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For these reasons, phenomenology in the form of qualitative research was the most suitable for the focus of this study.

**Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. Tisdell and Merriam (2016) noted that qualitative research is a methodology that focuses on not only meaning but also understanding. During this process, the researcher became the primary instrument for data collection and analysis using an inductive process to produce detailed descriptions as the final product (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016). Tisdell and Merriam (2016) also noted this form of research allows the researcher to collect more authentic data by interviewing, observing, and analyzing the actions and voice of the participants. The study sought to answer the study’s research questions that pertained to the participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon of personalized instruction. The researcher chose a qualitative approach for these reasons. By using
this method, the researcher was able to look for patterns and themes within the data, causing the researcher to think critically and create a more complex picture to answer the study’s research questions (Schmuck, 2017).

The researcher used a qualitative research design of transcendental phenomenology for this study to describe the essence of the lived experiences of general and special education teachers who utilized personalized instruction in the elementary school setting. Moustakas (1994) noted that phenomenology’s goal is to understand human experiences. Since the purpose of this particular study was to explore and describe the phenomenon of personalized instruction through the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers, and not comprehend these lived experiences, transcendental phenomenology was utilized (Chun, 2013). The notion of setting aside preconceived beliefs, which Moustakas (1994) called *epoche*, allowed the researcher to receive and collect authentic data without flawing the data with one’s personal biases.

Since the researcher had experience with personalized instruction, using transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to become a part of the research. The researcher started with revealing personal biases with the phenomenon to evaluate the phenomenon with a fresh set of eyes, allowing the true meaning of this phenomenon to emerge from individuals who have personal experiences with the phenomenon on a daily basis (Moustakas, 1994). Using this qualitative approach allowed the researcher to condense each participant’s responses to individual statements through a process known as horizontalization (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The researcher then looked for themes or phenomenological concepts (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher merged the participants’ statements to include general descriptions of the experiences, which included textual, what one will experience and structural, how the phenomenon is
experienced (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The overall phenomenological findings will enable the reader to have a better understanding of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Creswell (2013) suggested, “We use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist, or existent theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem” (p. 48). Because of the gap in the research regarding the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers as it pertains to personalized instruction and how those experiences impact the attitudes and beliefs of those teachers, the researcher chose to use qualitative transcendental phenomenology research for this study.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in qualitative data is to become the primary source of data collection (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In this study, the researcher collected data through initial and follow-up interviews, member checking, as well as collecting participants’ reflective journals. Since the researcher was the primary source of data collection, another major role of the researcher was to safeguard all collected data (Creswell, 2013; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

**Researcher’s Biases**

The researcher is a general education teacher with endorsements in middle school, general science, and social science. The researcher has taught in a self-contained classroom for two years and a middle school classroom for six years. Over the six-year course of teaching science, the researcher has taught both general and special education populations science through the inclusion model. Teachings to a broad range of learning abilities have given the researcher background knowledge of personalized learning. The researcher is biased from the standpoint of personal experiences with personalized learning and has a personal connection to the teachers in the middle school building.
The Context of the Study

Setting

The study took place in a small suburban school district. The background information shows the statistical population of the study. The city of the school district has been changed to protect the identity of the participants and is referred to as Golden City throughout the study. Golden City’s population, according to the 2016 census, was roughly 35,000. The racial and ethnic make-up of residents in Golden City included more than 50% African Americans, and less than 20% of Hispanics and Caucasians. The median income of Golden City residents was around $40,000, with 20% of the residents living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

The sample district included two schools, an elementary school and a middle school. According to data from the state-mandated PARCC test, 7% of the students in the district are ready for next-level instruction compared to 34% of the state’s students (Illinois Report Card, 2018c). Within the school district, 81% of the students come from low-income families, 4% are homeless, 13% have disabilities, and 13% are English Language Learners (Illinois Report Card, 2018c).

Since this study explored the lived experiences of elementary and special education teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction, the researcher-researched personal statistics on the teachers in the school district. After a careful examination of the statistics, the researcher learned that 58% of the teachers hold a master’s degree or higher, and 100% of the teachers carry a rating of proficient or excellent on teacher evaluations (Illinois Report Card, 2018c). The researcher used purposeful selection for this study, and this information was useful in determining if participants were eligible to participate.
The researcher conducted all research outside of the school’s contractual work hours at an off-site public library where only the researcher could hear participants’ responses in one-hour increments. During this time, the researcher interviewed each participant individually in a semistructured format. Participants chose the setting of their choice, outside of the school’s contractual work hours to self-reflect and journal throughout five days.

**Invitation of Participants**

The researcher first gained district approval from the district’s superintendent and each school’s principal. The researcher then sent a district-approved email to employees that explained the purpose and background of the study as well as the criteria to participate (see Appendix A). To be eligible to participate, participants needed to hold a valid Illinois K–9 teaching license, a bachelor’s degree, and have at least one year of experience with implementing personalized instruction. The email also explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher explained in the email that interviews would take place outside of contracted work hours and off the school’s premises and that the researcher would keep all participants’ identities confidential. The researcher shared personal contact information in the email so that participants could not be tracked through their work email if they wanted to participate.

Once the researcher acquired the number of participants needed for the study, the researcher sent out another email with a date and time for a personal meet and greet. At the meet and greet, participants had the opportunity to meet the researcher one-on-one and ask any questions about the study. The researcher also explained that there would be an initial and follow-up interview where the researcher would ask participants guided questions about personalized instruction. The researcher also explained that participants would be required to
keep a 5-day reflective journal on the topic of personalized instruction that the researcher would collect and analyze. Participants must have completed reflective journals by the follow-up interview. Finally, the researcher explained that participants would have the opportunity through member checking to verify that the researcher interpreted the data as the participant had intended (Creswell, 2014).

Participants signed a consent form validating that they met the requirements to participate in the study. The consent form was used to acknowledge that the participant understood that participation was voluntary and that they could stop attending at any time, that their identity would remain confidential, and that interviews might be audiotaped to ensure that all responses were recorded accurately at the personal meet and greet. The researcher collected all consent forms at the initial interview. Each participant met individually with the researcher to ensure that all participants’ identities remained confidential.

**Selection of Participants**

This transcendental phenomenological study utilized general and special education teachers in the elementary school setting. The participants for the study consisted of six general education teachers and four special education teachers. Teachers eligible to participate held a valid Illinois K–9 teaching license (general as well as special education teachers who push in the general education classroom), a bachelor’s degree, and at least one year of experience with implementing personalized instruction in the elementary classroom setting. The goal was to recruit at least one general education teacher from each grade level and one special education teacher from each grade band (Kindergarten–2, 3–5, and 6–8), for a total of 10 teachers. Utilizing teachers within this spectrum allowed variation and adequate representation of participants to answer the study’s research questions (Maxwell, 2013). There have been debates
from previous researchers on the number of participants required to complete a phenomenological study effectively; Denzin and Lincoln quoted Morse (1994) who suggested at least six participants while Creswell (2014) suggested from five to 25 participants. This study’s participation number of 10 participants fell within both researchers suggested numbers of five to 25 participants.

Purposeful selection involves the researcher purposely selecting participants who can give the researcher the best information necessary to answer the study’s research questions (Creswell, 2013; Suri, 2011). Criterion-i sample involves the selection of participants because of the knowledge and experiences the participant has with the study’s phenomenon, as the participant will be able to provide the researcher with information that is detailed and generalizable (Palinkas et al., 2015). For these reasons, the researcher chose participants utilizing purposeful criterion-i sampling. Chosen participants who worked in the educational system, and implemented personalized instruction gave the researcher the best insight to understand the phenomenon of personalized instruction (Creswell, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection Instruments

Interview Protocol

Merriam (2009) noted interviews are the primary source of data for qualitative research. The researcher was unable to interpret how the participants viewed the phenomenon of personalized instruction through observations; therefore, interviewing was necessary to gather the data needed to answer the study’s research questions (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016). Patton (2002) suggested interviews are essential to find out information that the researcher cannot directly observe like feelings, thoughts, or situations that have previously occurred. Merriam
(2009) noted that interviews give the researcher valuable information that makes the conversation one with a purpose.

This study utilized an initial interview as well as a follow-up interview. The interview questions the researcher used were from a previous study, created by Securro, Mayo, and Rinehart (2009) and are included in Appendix B. While the original interview questions were designed to address teacher’s beliefs and perceptions, the questions were modified to include the lived experiences of general and special education teachers as related to personalized instruction. These questions allowed the researcher to gain insight into the teacher’s lived experiences with the phenomenon of personalized instruction. The questions also allowed the researcher the opportunity to analyze personalized instruction based upon the participant’s experiences with the phenomenon and for the participants to explain how those experiences have shaped their attitudes and beliefs of the phenomenon.

The researcher asked the participants the study’s research questions in a semistructured way to allow for more in-depth responses and clarification purposes (Canals, 2017). The goal of the interview was to obtain as much data as possible to assess each participants’ perspective and understanding of the phenomenon of personalized instruction through their lived experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher can obtain this information through a more semistructured interview format (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016). Utilizing a semistructured form of interviewing allowed the researcher to ask participants the study’s research questions that best fit the flow of the conversation as new ideas emerged on the study’s research topic (Tisdell & Merriam, 2016). The follow-up interview allowed the participants to share any additional information in regards to the participant’s daily-lived experiences with personalized instruction and to discuss any
differences regarding their perceptions about personalized instruction. The follow-up interview questions are in Appendix C.

**Reflective Journal**

Participants were asked to keep a detailed journal for five days about experiences with personalized instruction. The researcher was able to take a more in-depth look at each participant’s reflections of personal beliefs and attitudes of personalized instruction through journaling. Participants wrote journal entries about current as well as past experiences of the implementation of personalized instruction. It is through journaling that the participants were able to feel more comfortable and become more open to retelling intimate details about experiences, whether good or bad, about the phenomenon (Canals, 2017). The study’s research questions sought to not only describe teachers’ lived experiences with personalized instruction but how those experiences have impacted the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs with personalized instruction. Journaling allowed the participants the opportunity to document those lived experiences and then reflect on how those experiences impacted the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about the phenomenon allowing the researcher to collect authentic data. The researcher analyzed this data to capture the overall essence of the phenomenon of personalized instruction.

**Data Collection and Procedures**

**Interview Protocol**

**Initial interview.** The researcher interviewed participants outside of contractual work hours at the city’s public library for 45 minutes to one hour to allow enough time for participants to be able to answer all questions without feeling rushed or pressured. The researcher always had bottles of water for participants, and extra batteries for the audio-recorder used to record each interview. The interview began with an overview of the researchers and participant’s roles in the
study. The researcher then asked the participant to turn in the consent form permitting the researcher to collect data and to record the interview that was passed out in the meet and greet if one had not already been submitted (Braun & Clarke, 2013). If the participant did not have the form, the researcher gave the participant a new consent form to sign at the beginning of the initial interview. If the participant did not want the interview audio-recorded, the researcher hand wrote out all responses in separate notebooks that were locked up in a book bag after each interview. The notebook was stored in a lockbox in the researcher’s home when not in use, and for three years after all completed research (Creswell, 2013). The researcher will then shred all notes from the study for the protection of all participants (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher began the initial interview by asking the participant the study’s research questions found in Appendix A. Having the participant comfortable during the research process is essential in sharing personal information with the researcher (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong Rice, 2006). The goal of the interview was for participants to share lived experiences with the researcher to gain a clear understanding of the participants’ attitudes and beliefs with the study’s phenomenon (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006). The researcher acquired rich and valuable data from this study. The collected data was the experiences and beliefs of elementary and special education teachers in the general education classroom (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The researcher looked for signs in body language from the participant to sense that the participant was comfortable with answering the study’s interview questions. The researcher looked for nonverbal cues from the participant—the participant was answering questions using several sentences, the participant was making eye contact, and the participant’s body was relaxed. After the researcher had concluded that the participant was relaxed, the researcher began
to ask the participant the study’s research questions in a semistructured way (Oltmann, 2016). The researcher only asked the participant the study’s research questions and probing questions if the researcher did not fully understand the participant’s response to ensure that the researcher had a clear understanding of the participant’s answers (Creswell, 2013).

The initial interview focused on establishing the participant’s experiences with personalized instruction (Seidman, 2013). The researcher ended the interview thanking the participant for their time and reiterating that all data collected from the interview would be solely in the researcher’s possession as electronic data would be password protected, and hard copies would be locked in a box that only the researcher had access. The researcher also reminded the participants that the researcher would not use names in the final findings; instead, the researcher assigned each participant a unique code to protect each participant’s identity.

Participants were given a sheet with directions on how to reflective journal (see Appendix C). The researcher went over the form to ensure the participant understood the instructions and answered any questions the participant may have had. The researcher then asked the participant to have the reflective journal complete before the follow-up interview date and explained that there was no limit to how much information the participant shared as long as the participant was open and honest.

Finally, after collecting each participant’s scheduling availability, the researcher set up a schedule for the follow-up interview to take place (two weeks from the initial interview). The researcher asked participants to keep the questions as well as their responses confidential to ensure the integrity of the study. The researcher immediately filed all electronic data using a password-protected computer and locked up all voice recorded data after each interview. The researcher repeated the same procedure for all participants. The researcher sent out a
confirmation email to each participant three days before the follow-up interview, confirming each participant’s attendance.

**Follow-up interview.** Follow-up interviews occurred after the completion of all initial interviews. The follow-up interviews took place approximately two weeks after the initial interview. Participants received an email with possible dates and times and chose a first, second, and third choice. The researcher used the participants’ choices to create a schedule for follow-up interviews. The researcher allowed 15–20 minutes for each interview session to ensure enough time for each participant to answer the study’s follow-up questions without feeling rushed. After greeting the participant, the researcher reviewed the roles of the participant and the researcher and reminded the participant that all information shared would be kept confidential. The goal of the follow-up interview was to get more concrete details of the participant’s lived experiences with the phenomenon that the participant shared but did not elaborate on in the initial interview (Seidman, 2013). The researcher asked participants a different set of questions for the follow-up interview (see Appendix B). It is through the study’s interview questions that the researcher could reconstruct the details of the participants’ experiences with personalized instruction (Seidman, 2013).

The researcher collected the participant’s reflective journal at the end of the final interview. The researcher invited participants back for member checking to verify that all interpretations of the data were interpreted correctly after the collection of all data (Creswell, 2014).

**Reflective Journal**

The reflective journal helped answer the study’s research questions by having the participants describe one’s own lived experiences when utilizing the personalized learning model.
in an elementary setting. The researcher used the information from each participant’s journal to capture the essence of the participant’s experiences, attitudes, and beliefs concerning personalized instruction in the elementary classroom. At the end of the initial interview, the researcher gave participants a composition book, labeled with the participant’s unique number and the researcher’s personal information to reflective journal. The researcher glued directions on the front cover of each composition book (see Appendix D). The researcher asked each participant to keep a handwritten reflective journal for five days describing their daily experiences with personalized instruction. According to Hatch (2002), the most “obvious strength to journaling is they can provide a direct path into the insights of the participants” since some individuals are more comfortable expressing their insights, feelings, and beliefs in written form (p. 141).

The written account helped the researcher obtain a deeper understanding of the essence of personalized instruction. It was through journaling that the researcher analyzed each participant’s lived experiences as it related to the phenomenon and how those lived experiences have shaped their attitudes and beliefs about personalized learning (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

**Data Analysis Plan**

The researcher used modified Stevick-Colaizzi Keen’s method to analyze all data. The researcher collected and organized all data using Microsoft Word. The original, as well as electronic transcripts were duplicated and stored using a password-protected thumb drive that was locked in a safe box for the protection and privacy of the participants. This procedure also acted as a backup plan just in case the electronic files became corrupt or the original prints become damaged or lost. After securing the data, the researcher started to analyze the data.
After transcribing the collected data from each participant’s interview and reflective journal, the researcher used qualitative computer software NVivo12. NVivo12 is a computerized software program that allows researchers to store and organize data from interviews that categorizes and analyzes the data into themes in a matter of seconds (QSR International, 2018). This computer software allowed the researcher to search for common word usage, identify themes, attach codes to textual patterns and develop overall conclusions as it related to personalized instruction.

The first step started with the researcher’s epoche. During this process, the researcher viewed all data with a fresh set of eyes by revealing all biases as it related to the phenomenon of personalized instruction (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the researcher started the process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction. During this process, the researcher considered the phenomenon from the different perspectives of the participants by considering each participant’s described statements (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher recorded all relevant statements (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher began the process of segmenting the invariant horizons by looking for non-repetitive statements (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then clustered the invariant meaning units into themes (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the researcher combined the invariant meaning units and themes ending with a textual description of the phenomenon including exact quotes from the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step in this process included imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, the researcher used the textual descriptions to construct a structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the researcher synthesized this information by combining the textual and structural descriptions to form a textual-structural essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process was repeated for each participant until saturation
was reached (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher combined the textual-structural descriptions into an overall description that represented the essence of experience for the entire group of participants that answered the study’s research questions (Moustakas, 1994). This data analysis process provided an essence of the participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon while protecting the integrity of the data to create an understanding of the phenomenon of personalized instruction from the voices of individuals who have lived through it (Statistics Solutions, 2018).

**Limitations of Research Design**

The limitations of this study are related to setting and sample size. The setting took place in a small suburban district, which limits the findings based on demographics. The sample size was also limited, because of the small district, which may limit the ability to generalize findings. The researcher is a new teacher in the district where the study occurred; therefore participants may not have wanted to share intimate information with the researcher. Braun and Clarke (2013) stressed that relationships are essential to data collection, as the researcher is the instrument when it comes to data collection that needs to ethically gain the information required to answer the study’s research questions.

**Validation**

This study sought to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of general and special education teachers as related to the phenomenon of personalized instruction. The researcher presented a qualitative study that gave participants the opportunity to express their attitudes and beliefs on the subject of personalized instruction through their individual lived experiences.
Credibility

Credibility links research findings to reality to demonstrate the accuracy in the research study’s findings (Statistics Solutions, 2018b). Two techniques that a researcher could use to ensure the credibility of the research study’s findings is through triangulation and member checking (Statistics Solutions, 2018b).

**Triangulation.** The researcher used triangulation to ensure the credibility of the data. By collecting data from multiple sources, the researcher converged various perspectives from the participants that will further validate the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher triangulated the data by comparing and crosschecking data collected from multiple interview sessions (initial and follow-up), participants’ reflective journals, and through member checking giving the researcher different perspectives about the phenomenon of personalized instruction.

**Member checking.** Tisdell and Merriam (2016) referred to member checking as respondent validation. Through member checking, the researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to validate findings from the researcher as accurate. This form of internal validity is according to Tisdell and Merriam (2016) “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do, as well as identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed” (p. 217). During this process, the researcher questioned the participants to document the accuracy of the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). If participants did not agree with the researcher’s interpretations, the participants had the opportunity to meet with the researcher to read their interviews (initial and follow-up), and journal reflection transcripts so that participants could give the researcher any suggestions or corrections found within the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher asked participants a different set of questions found in Appendix E for the member checking process.
After reviewing and answering all questions, participants signed a form indicating that they had reviewed the transcripts and to the best of their knowledge all responses were accurately analyzed.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency of research findings (Universal Teacher, 2018). The researcher used reliability to validate the dependability of the data. The researcher collected data utilizing multiple methods. The researcher used triangulation of data, member checking, researcher reflection notes, and rich and thick descriptions in field notes as measures to strengthen the dependability of the data.

**Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Trochim, 2006). Tisdell and Merriam (2016) listed several strategies that could be used to ensure the reliability of a study that includes triangulation, peer examination, clarification of the researcher’s position and audit trail.

For this study, in addition to triangulation, the researcher also maintained an audit trail. The researcher described in detail the implementation of the research design and how data was gathered to ensure that if others were to repeat the same study, all aspects would be the same (Trochim, 2006). In addition to participants keeping a reflective journal, the researcher also maintained a reflective journal about the research process. Journaling allowed the researcher to examine one’s assumptions and goals and to clarify one’s personal beliefs (Russell & Kelly, 2002). During this process, the researcher maintained a reflective journal in which the researcher documented observations, thoughts, and emotions about each interview. The researcher also noted the participants’ behaviors during the interview process. Hatch (2002) thought that
journaling reflected honest accounts of studying others and would help to justify nonverbal cues that may occur that are contradictory to participant responses to the study’s interview questions. Self-reflective journaling also allowed for transparency in the data analysis process (MacNaughton, 2001).

**Expected Findings**

Expected findings

Qualitative research attempts to uncover a phenomenon in a participant’s natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This transcendental phenomenological study focused on teacher’s attitudes and beliefs of personalized instruction through interviews and reflective journaling. The researcher expected that participants would be willing to participate in the study, as participants were asked to volunteer. The researcher also expected participants to answer all questions openly and honestly. Since this study focused on the participants’ insight and perspective, the researcher expected that participants would answer the study’s research questions to the best of their professional ability. Finally, the researcher expected that participants would reveal what works with personalized instruction as well as the struggles that educators might face when implementing personalized instruction.

**Measure for Ethical Protections of Participants**

Researcher’s Position Statement

The researcher’s role included being the sole recruiter, scheduler, and selector of participants. The researcher was also the only person to collect and analyze all data. As data was received, the researcher secured all data in a lockbox and for three years after the completion of the study, and then all data will be destroyed by the use of a paper shredder in the home of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Since the researcher has worked with the participants in the past,
participants may be more comfortable disclosing information with the researcher but could also cause the participants to have conversations outside of the research topic.

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The researcher is not and has not been in any supervisor or administration position over the study’s participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any chosen time without penalization from the participant’s job. There was no monetary gain for participants to participate in the study. Finally, the researcher had not made any outside arrangements with organizations that could cause a conflict with accurately reporting results from the study.

**Ethical Issues in the Study**

Participation in this transcendental phenomenological study posed minimal risk to participants as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has defined minimal risk as harm or discomfort not exceeding what participants would encounter in everyday life. The researcher gained approval from the Concordia University–Portland IRB, as well as the school district’s superintendent before any data was collected. The researcher created a survey using Qualtrics software to collect demographic information from participants prior to the initial interview. The researcher included a link in the invitation letter (found in Appendix A) that participants used to share this information with the researcher so that no identifiable information was exchanged during the interview process. The researcher used the information from the survey to assign each participant a pseudonym using a four-digit numerical code (i.e., Participant #1234).

Once the researcher received participant consent forms, the researcher replaced all participants’ personal information with the assigned pseudonyms for the protection of all parties involved in the study. The IRB board, as well as the school district, considered and approved any potential ethical issues. The researcher gave each participant a consent form that explained the
purpose of the study, potential risks of participation and the researcher’s contact information. Included in the consent form, provided in Appendix F, was a space where participants could opt out of having responses recorded during the interview process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the researcher informed participants that participation could end at any time during the study. The researcher also invited participants to review all data after analysis for approval of the researcher’s interpretations. For these reasons, the research posed minimal risk to participants.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

This chapter explained the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study. The chapter also explained the rationale behind choosing this research design. The researcher included a description of the researcher’s role as well as biases, the setting in which the study took place as well as how the researcher selected participants. The researcher explained sampling techniques, how the researcher collected and analyzed data, and which data instruments the researcher used for the study. The researcher discussed limitations to the research design and how the researcher validated the study’s findings. The researcher used six general education teachers and four special education teachers for this study to share lived experiences of the implementation of personalized instruction.

Chapter 4 describes the results of the study. The chapter begins with an explanation of the data collection process as well as how the data was analyzed. The researcher will present a description of one’s own experiences with personalized instruction recommended by Moustakas (1994). Next, the researcher documents themes as well as textual and structural descriptions for participants as well as the researcher. Finally, textual and structural descriptions will be analyzed and fused so that the reader can understand the overall essence of personalized instruction.
Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of the findings as it relates to the study’s conceptual framework. Also, this chapter will consist of recommendations for future research and action as well as implications for positive change in education. Finally, the researcher will present reflections of the phenomenological research process.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the daily lived experiences of general and special education teachers who implement personalized learning in the classroom setting and how those lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized learning. The researcher posed three questions to explore the lived experiences of general and special education teachers:

1. How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?
2. How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?
3. What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?

The researcher collected data from initial and follow-up interviews, as well as reviewing participants’ reflective journals to answer the study’s research questions.

This chapter presents the results of the transcendental phenomenological analysis of the participants’ interviews as well as reflective journals. The lived experiences of the participants become essential in the context of this study because these lived experiences provide an awareness of how the implementation of personalized learning influence the attitudes and beliefs of general and special education teachers about personalized learning.

Review of Data Collection Procedures

After receiving permission to conduct research from Concordia University’s IRB and the research site, the researcher emailed an invitation letter to the superintendent and principals of the school district. The email provided instructions to the superintendent and principals on how
to distribute the invitation letter to all general and special education teachers. A meeting took place a week after the distribution of the invitation letter that explained the purpose of the study. The researcher distributed consent forms to any teacher who was willing or thought they would be interested in participating. Following the meeting, eight teachers agreed to participate in the study, and within a week, four more teachers agreed to participate. Through purposeful selection, the required 10 participants were selected to participate in the study. All participants received an email to choose three preferable time slots to schedule initial and follow-up interviews. Each participant received another email after all participants responded to the scheduling email with their interview date and time, and email reminders were sent out three days before initial and follow-up interviews for confirmation and rescheduling if necessary. The collection of reflective journals occurred during each follow-up interview. The researcher conducted all interviews during noncontractual work hours at the city’s public library.

In conducting the initial interview, the researcher used an oral questionnaire from a previous study, created by Securro et al. (2009) in Appendix B. The times for the initial interviews varied from 45 minutes to an hour. Each participant answered 10 open-ended questions regarding their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized learning and how those lived experiences have shaped their attitudes and beliefs about personalized learning. After completion of the initial interview, participants were given a composition book with instructions to begin their reflective journaling, documenting their lived experiences with the implementation of personalized learning. After each interview, I thanked the participants for their time. The researcher uploaded each audio recorded interview to a secured password-protected computer, and all reflective journals were locked in a box in the researcher’s home.
The second stage of the data collection process included follow-up interviews in which participants were asked three questions (see Appendix C). Follow-up interviews ranged from 15–20 minutes. The follow-up interview allowed the participants to clarify and elaborate with additional information in regards to the participant’s daily-lived experiences with personalized instruction.

The final stage of data collection included collecting each participant’s reflective journal at the follow-up interview. Two of the 10 participants did not turn in a reflective journal. The participants declared that there was not enough available time to complete the reflective journal. The purpose of the reflective journal was to allow participants the opportunity to expand on their personal experiences and beliefs about personalized instruction in a more intimate way. Participants were asked to complete five journal entries over two weeks with no limit on how much information was shared. The average length of the journal entries was a paragraph, and only one participant documented five entries while the remaining participants documented 3–4 entries.

**Data Management**

The researcher secured all collected data in a locked safe box, located in the researcher’s home. The researcher also protected all audio recorded interview data by downloading all recorded files to a password protected computer. The researcher also protected participant’s reflective journals, and the researcher’s field notes by typing and saving all files to a password protected computer. The researcher also saved the field notes and reflective journals to an encrypted flash drive that was also stored in a locked file cabinet located in the researcher’s home. The researcher also locked the audio recorder that was used for the initial and follow-up interviews in a safe box after each interview. All data was labeled, filed, and placed in order of
each participant’s four digit number. The researcher will store all data for a minimum of three years, and then destroy using a secure process.

**Analysis of Data**

This study relied on modified Stevick-Colaizzi Keen’s method to analyze all data (Moustakas, 1994). This data analysis summary represents the outcomes of the following steps of that method. I began with the process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction. During this process, I considered the phenomenon from the different perspectives of the participants by considering each participant’s described statements (Moustakas, 1994). I noted all statements relevant to answering the research questions and then identified invariant meaning units, which were non-repetitive statements that could be summarized to indicate their relevance to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Using Nvivo 12 software, I then clustered the invariant meaning units into themes. The researcher will provide the results of the remaining steps of the analysis in this chapter. Responses from each participant were separately coded and themed first, and then compiled. Results of individual analyses were retained to facilitate the development of individual textural and structural descriptions, but the researcher presents only composite frequencies in this summary.

Following the coding and categorization of the data, nine key phrases emerged that were used to analyze both the general and special education teacher’s interview responses. The key phrases were (a) expertise implementing personalized learning, (b) instructional features that are effective when delivering personalized instruction, (c) student interest and motivation, (d) teacher satisfaction when implementing personalized instruction, (e) attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction, (f) major barriers of implementing personalized instruction, (g) time as a limited source, (h) required resources and supports needed implementation, and (i) benefit of
small group instruction. The researcher based these nine critical phrases on the initial and follow-up interview questions designed for this study.

All textual data identified in the Nvivo 12 software program was exported to an Excel spreadsheet for ease of readability. Excel provided three spreadsheets: Code Book, Themes, and Open Code. The Open Code contained the data that the researcher retrieved from Nvivo from the initial, follow-up interviews, and reflective journal entries. Code Book contains the axial and selected codes generated from the open codes. Finally, Themes contained the tabulated frequency and percentages of the participants’ responses based on the axial and selective codes.

**Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions for Interview Data**

This section presents a summarized description of how each of the general and special education teachers who have or who are currently implementing personalized instruction described their daily classroom experiences and how those lived experiences impacted their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized instruction. Individual textural and structural descriptions provided the fundamental depictions for each participant’s perceptions concerning the thematic categories that arise throughout the analysis of the participant interviews. The researcher organized the data for each participant.

**Special Education Teacher, 0001.** Teacher 0001 has served as a special education teacher for over five years. The lived experiences shared by this teacher have molded their beliefs about personalized instruction. For example, Teacher 0001 believed that personalized instruction is critical for teachers to implement with students because students are on varying academic levels. This teacher said,

> When you have personalized instruction, you’re actually saying okay, I’m acknowledging the fact that kids learn differently. I’m acknowledging the fact that kids are more than
numbers in the classroom. I’m acknowledging the fact that kid one needs me to pull them out, set them aside, learn, and see where they are and then focus and see where they need to go.

While Teacher 0001 has been implementing personalized learning for over five years, this participant felt that one of the useful instructional features of personalized learning was small group sizes. This teacher thought, “I just think in order to be really effective, it’s really important to keep the groups small, so no more than 5–6 students. Well, the bigger the group, the more you know off task the students are.”

**General Education Teacher, 0002.** Teacher 0002 has served as a general education teacher for over 5 years. This teacher has seen several changes in the educational system. The teacher’s attitude toward personalized learning has shifted. With these changes, the teacher believes that there is a need to transition from whole classroom instruction to personalized learning. The teacher thought, “now that we have to do so much individualized learning for students, I can’t, it’s like I’m not an octopus.” Teacher 0002 also believed that technology was fundamental to implement personalized instruction effectively. There are so many different programs that assist teachers with reaching students with diverse academic needs. Technology is a critical component of personalized instruction. Teacher 0002 stated,

> So one of the instructional features for personalized learning would be computer-assisted learning. The computer can give an assessment to a child and then determine the needs or the academic needs of the student, and then based on that, then work is given to the child, and the child is able to get instructional assistance as well as practice.

Teacher 0002 felt that personalized learning helped motivate students to learn and helped boost student confidence when implemented with technology. This teacher believed, “I think it’s a
great tool to contribute to kids that are below level, they can get some of the support that they need, and I think it lowers like the bullying too.”

**Special Education Teacher, 0003.** Teacher 0003 has served as a special education teacher for many years. This teacher not only teaches students but also makes accommodations for students with varying academic needs. This teacher has worked closely with general education teachers and over time, developed strong beliefs about personalized instruction. This teacher stated, “Here’s the thing, the real deal, a lot of these people do not adhere to it okay you give them a script of how to instruct with accommodations and but a lot of them are not being followed. You have to want kids to learn.” This particular teacher had a strong desire to implement personalized instruction because of the benefits seen for the students that this teacher services. This teacher said,

Every child does not learn the same way. To meet the needs of each student, you have to find out how they learn. Again where they are academically performance level and build from there. If my attitude is whole group, I’m gone lose half of my class, and that’s not fair.

This teacher has taken several professional development courses as well as classes on meeting students at their academic levels and has observed different barriers with the implementation of personalized instruction. This teacher said,

When I push in the classroom, again, a lot of teachers do not like small groups. Teachers are just doing whole group. I don’t think they really want to entertain that small group of personalized instruction. It’s like I’m giving it to you, you better catch it if you can. If not, oh well.
**General Education Teacher, 0004.** Teacher 0004 has served as a general education teacher for over 10 years. The lived experiences shared by this teacher have shifted this teacher’s pedagogy beliefs. For example, Teacher 0004 said,

I think the only way to reach students at their level is to meet them at their academic needs. You have to be able to do that in order for students to progress. We’re still doing the traditionally where everybody gets the one-sized fit. Students are not making gains in that manner.

This teacher has been utilizing personalized instruction for over five years and has learned that the learning features of personalized learning can cater to the whole child. This teacher said, “Creating groups as well as activities that are shown to their learning styles not just their learning styles but their learning levels I meant. That’s one of the best things I know works with students.” Teacher 0004 believed that there are barriers when it comes to implementing personalized instruction, with time being the most significant barrier. Still, the time is worth the investment, “Well, there’s a lot of planning, so that’s probably the only thing that teachers will say, but I think that it’s teacher-friendly because that’s our whole purpose is to make sure that our students are academically successful.”

**General Education Teacher, 0005.** Teacher 0005 has served as a general education teacher for over 5 years. The lived experiences shared by this teacher have molded their belief around the phenomenon of personalized instruction. This teacher is used to the mortar building of schools and fears that personalized learning, paired with the advancement of today’s students, will transition schools to transform completely. This teacher said,

It seems like, with the kids of today, the notion of the classroom is kind of going to disappear. Now we’re going to teach each individual child what it is he or she needs, and
so then what happens to the classroom setting? Then it’s gone look like a computer lab. You know, like it may be like somebody online, or I can just email you your assignment, and then you can ask me if you need help.

Although Teacher 0005 felt as though personalized instruction is effective, this participant also felt as though the amount of time and work makes personalized learning very ineffective. This participant declared, “I really believe that it’s extremely unteacher friendly. It’s not teacher-friendly! If I have, for example, four groups, then I need lesson plans for each one of those groups. If I’m doing ELA, ELA is a lot less fluid than math is, and so I’m doing lesson plans for my whole group, and then I have to have lesson plans for each of those four groups. That’s a lot!” Finally, Teacher 0005 felt that having too many students in one class with varying academic levels was a barrier to personalized instruction. This barrier makes it hard to see and reach all students. Therefore, some students do not get needed help, even when implementing personalized instruction. This teacher said,

Maybe having classes that aren’t so mixed where there are students who have such a wide range, so I don’t have kids who are at a second-grade level, and I don’t have kids who are at an eighth-grade level. Like how do I reach every single one of them every single day?

**General Education Teacher, 0006.** Teacher 0006 has served as a general education teacher for over 5 years. The lived experiences of this teacher have framed their beliefs about personalized instruction. This teacher believed,

I like the fact that when you do more personalized instruction, you can kind of teach to the student’s learning modality. So when you know like the kid’s learning style, when
you’re doing individualized instruction, you can kind of design your activities around what the kids tend to gravitate to in regards to their learning style.

While this teacher has been implementing personalized instruction for over 5 years, they feel as though time is a significant barrier. Still, it is well worth the investment,

Definitely going to take more time on the planning part of it. It’s definitely something that you have to invest like a lot of time. It definitely requires way more planning than just doing like a whole group lesson so but I think that like if done properly, it would actually like save you instruction time.

Lastly, this teacher has seen the success in implementing personalized instruction as student achievement has increased. The teacher is satisfied with the results from the implementation, as student success has grown, “from my personal experience I’ve noticed that students when I’m able to implement personalized instruction on a personalized path with kids I’m noticing that the kids are having more traction quicker on concepts.”

**Special Education Teacher, 0007.** Teacher 0007 has served as a special education teacher for many years. This teacher’s lived experiences have transformed their beliefs about personalized instruction. This teacher felt as though personalized instruction is useful in the elementary classroom, “It’s definitely effective for teaching because if students are just taught rote material according to a curriculum, according to a map, they’re not going to be successful. You have to teach the students where they are, that’s number one.” Teacher 0007 also believed that personalized learning helped to motivate students to learn because of the personal connection that the student develops with the teacher. The student realizes with personalized instruction that the teacher notices that the student needs extra help or learns differently. This teacher thought,
They’re going to realize that hey the teacher understands that I don’t know what I’m doing with this. Or the teacher understands that I need this attention. So I think that’s going to help them be a little bit more focused on their work. They’re going to understand that you understand whatever it is that they need, and I think they’re going to appreciate it.

**Special Education Teacher, 0008.** Teacher 0008 has served as a special education teacher for many years. The lived experiences shared by this teacher have molded their beliefs about personalized instruction. For example, Teacher 0008 believed that “you have to get real personal and on their level to actually reach them to get them to understand exactly what you want, and repetition. Repetition is very, very important to reach a diverse learner.” While this teacher has been implementing personalized learning for several years and believes that personalized learning is of great benefit, the teacher indicated that they feel they have the ability to teach any student with or without personalizing their lessons. The participant admitted,

Because my understanding of teaching and learning me as a person how I feel about a child and children and I just feel that I can reach every student any subject absolutely!

Yes, with or without, I believe I can teach and reach any child.

Teacher 0008 also believed that challenges related to the implementation of personalized instruction in an inclusive classroom stem from students feeling inadequate and ill-equipped to meet the demands in a traditional classroom setting. Teacher 0008 said that in the general education setting, there are “different types of learners and students.” This teacher also said,

You have the diverse with the gen ed. and then here come the name-calling, here come the now I’m shy because I’m in front of you all. I don’t want you all to feel that I’m dumb or I’m stupid or I’m slow, but technically they’re not. They just learn in a different way.
**General education teacher, 0009.** Teacher 0009 has served as a general education teacher for over 5 years. The lived experiences of this teacher have shifted their beliefs of personalized instruction. This teacher realized that outside factors play a role in how successful students are in the classroom. If the teacher took the time to think about the student as a whole, met them at their need, built positive relationships with the students, and utilized small group instruction, then students would feel more motivated to learn. This teacher said,

> They deal with so many different things when they come to school. It can be kind of hard to target everybody in that one lesson, especially if you’re already not on grade level. Small group kind of forces students no matter what the demographic is socioeconomic no matter what it is, it’s like hey it’s me and you right now and over time because they’re building that relationship they do eventually kind of like come out the shell.

While Teacher 0009 agreed that personalized instruction was effective, this teacher also felt as though there was not enough training for teachers to teach using the personalized instruction model effectively. This teacher said,

> I think it would be effective; that’s the only way I’ve known instruction to happen in my most recent years of teaching. Whatever school I’ve been at is being able to do small group instruction every time all the time right. However, doing it effectively, I think, is what matters, so I think that’s to me is the biggest kicker is do teachers know how to do small group instruction effectively. Otherwise, small group instruction in isolation the whole idea is great, but if you don’t know what you’re doing, then it’s not going to be beneficial.

To further expand on this, Teacher 0009 felt as though without the proper training for implantation, teachers are ineffectively teaching students, and therefore personalized instruction is not teacher-friendly. This teacher confessed,
I do feel that there has to be some proper training for teachers to fully understand how that
how small group instruction can be most effective for them and their students. Teachers
really being able to identify what students need to work on, providing them with the right
materials for them to work on, maybe having an exit slip at the end to see how progress
monitoring. I feel like it’s a whole circle or like a teaching process that has to be done in
order for it to be effective. Otherwise, you all are just meeting at the kidney table to be
meeting at the kidney table, then it becomes less effective, and the term you used less
teacher-friendly.

**General education teacher, 0010.** Teacher 0010 has served as a general education
teacher for several years. The lived experiences of this teacher have transformed their beliefs
about personalized instruction. This teacher has been utilizing personalized instruction for three
years and felt as though personalized instruction was effective. This teacher also felt as if
teachers did not have to use personalized instruction to teach. This teacher believed

I can only because of my methods of teaching, which aren’t strictly by the book. Yes, I am
able to get across and get through to every student in some way, shape, or form. I am able
to do it effectively; of course, personalized instruction would be helpful, but I am able to do
it.

Teacher 0010 felt that a smaller setting made the lesson more personable for the student because
the teacher learns more about the student’s abilities in a more intimate setting. This teacher stated,

Well, small group instruction allows for more one on one personable interaction with a
student to give them that extra help that they need. It allows you to not only get to know
that student and their learning abilities, or lack thereof, but it helps you to better help them
in areas that you may or may not see in a larger.
Finally, Teacher 0010 believed that personalized instruction increased teacher preparation and planning time. Still, if implemented correctly, decreased classroom teaching and management time. This teacher thought,

I think that as long as it’s organized properly and we have the right students in those particular groups, I think that it would be effective not only academically but possibly behaviorally. It may add a little more work for the teacher, but it may also lighten the load in the general classroom for the teacher.

**Individual Textural -Structural Descriptions for Journal Entries**

**Special Education Teacher, 0001.** Teacher 0001 realized the benefit of small group instruction when it came to personalized learning but also noted that small group instruction was still too much for some students who might benefit from more one-on-one instruction. This participant stated, “R is in a group of 3 other students, and he is the only one who will shy away from showing his progress. When pulled for one-on-on intervention time, R is more attentive, focused, and responsible. Personalized instruction for R is more productive during the individually-focused time. Small group instruction seems to be too much for student.” This teacher also noted that some students who were academically low would shut down when they worked with same-aged peers even though they all were on the same academic level. However, this same student flourished when working with lower aged peers. This teacher declared,

Once A started personalization instruction, I noticed that, mentally and emotionally, A works better with a group of peers who are grade level(s) below him. I’ve worked with A amongst his fellow peers (same grade), and there is a significant difference in how he interacts with those who are the same age and those who are younger. He is much more comfortable with those who are younger. He blends in with them very well. This
comfortability allowed him to engage more in comprehension conversations as opposed to staying silent and shutting down.

**General Education Teacher, 0002.** Teacher 0002 reflected on several observable strengths of personalized learning. This teacher saw an increase in student achievement as well as student confidence as the student was able to individually navigate through lessons without fears or concerns from peers knowing what the student was working on or the progress the student was making. This teacher said,

> Personalized learning (PL) is one of the strongest avenues for achieving optimal academic growth amongst student learning. It allows teachers to teach each child at their own learning level and learning pace. Personalized learning, be it at the small group table or on an individual learning device, shame will be less of an issue because student learning would be private. They will not have to look around the classroom to see if other students are going to laugh if they get something wrong. Personalized learning would build confidence.

This teacher also felt as though personalized learning would help students who deal with stress when it comes to how low they may be academically,

> PL reduces the negative social, emotional distress that being below academic level projects onto the lives of students. Many students are embarrassed about being behind in their learning. Students will not be afraid of trying. Students will not feel inferior to other students that they feel are smarter than them or that they are getting more answers right.

Teacher 0002 also noted that there was no clear definition for personalized learning; therefore, proper training has not taken place for teachers to implement personalized learning effectively.
This teacher felt as though teachers have had to come up with their idea of what personalized learning looks like based on what others advertised as personalized learning. This teacher said,

What really is [Personalized Learning]? PL would also need some type of common understanding and professional development. At this time, there are so many definitions of PL. Many people refer to blended learning as one of its major components. I agree! I agree mainly because I have been left to come up with my own understanding of this concept. I have used the explanations from many software companies to help me build my understanding because they always present themselves as a personalized learning tool. How can PL be successful if you are not doing it correctly? How can we implement PL correctly if we are not trained? This is frustrating.

Special Education Teacher, 0003. Teacher 0003 believed that small group instruction helps to build student confidence as the students are working on content at their level,

I think working in small groups build their confidence to try. I have seen the progress in my students working in small groups on their level and how they like to learn. We do a lot of hands-on learning, and even when they struggle, they don’t give up; they even help each other. My students are making gains academically, and their confidence is growing.

This teacher also felt as though whole group instruction could cause a student to shut down, and teachers should move away from whole group instruction, especially when teaching special education students. This teacher said,

I pushed in the classroom today and was disappointed that my students weren’t given the opportunity to participate because instruction was whole group. My students sat with me, and we did small group instruction together, but the entire point of pushing in was not to have them sit together but to be amongst their peers.
**General Education Teacher, 0004.** Teacher 0004 realized that analyzing student data was essential when planning for personalized instruction because the data gives teachers an insight into the student’s strengths as well as weaknesses. This teacher professed,

> When I couldn’t move test scores, I knew I had to do something different, and deep-diving into the data made me realize that not only did I have students on so many different levels, they were all over the place on the charts. I had to find a way to reach everyone.

This teacher also realized a change in student behavior once the students used personalized learning daily in the classroom. This changed behavior led this teacher to believe that students act out when they do not understand the content or if they had already mastered the material. This teacher said, “When I wasn’t using personalized instruction I had behavior issues in my class from the students who didn’t get it and also from the students who got it and became bored from waiting on everyone else to get it.” Finally, this teacher felt as though personalized instruction boosted student’s confidence as the students were able to comprehend and master at-level content. This teacher said, “I met with small groups today, and it made me feel good to see how happy my students were when they left the kidney table because they understood the lesson that I taught them during small group instruction.”

**General Education Teacher, 0006.** Teacher 0006 felt that students feel more comfortable in small group instruction as opposed to whole group instruction,

> The student’s response to the small groups has been favorable. Most students prefer small groups opposed to whole group instruction. They feel like they get a more clear understanding of the concepts and individualize support. They are also more inclined to ask questions in a smaller setting.
This teacher determined that time becomes a significant barrier in not only the planning and preparation needed to implement personalized learning but also tracking and analyzing student data. This participant thought,

Planning for individualized instruction takes a lot of time upfront, especially if you’re teaching a departmentalized course. It takes hours to process the data and organize resources beyond the online computer-based digital learning pathways. The drawback is TIME. Small group does not allow for me to work with all groups on a given day; therefore, it can also affect the pacing. Finding a balance between whole group and individualized instruction has been a challenge.

However, this teacher also felt that the time is worth the effort because it leads to student achievement on both the low and high end of the academic spectrum,

The individualized plans flows nicely once systems and expectations are put in place. My favorite component of individualized learning is small group instruction. It allows for me to narrow down the misconceptions and address the deficits the students may have. It also allows me to push my advanced students forward.”

**Special Education Teacher, 0008.** Teacher 0008 found that although students enjoy socializing with peers who are their same age, they do not necessarily enjoy learning with peers their same age. This teacher said, “Although they like being with their peers during lunch and recess time, they do not enjoy learning with them because they are afraid of what they will say if they get an answer incorrect.” This teacher also felt as though unless the entire school implemented personalized learning, special education students would not feel comfortable being mainstreamed with the general education population. This teacher said, “I know that they need to be mainstreamed in with the gen ed. population, but I also think that until the entire school is
personalizing instruction, my diverse learners will not feel comfortable in the gen ed. learning environment.” Finally, this teacher felt as though small group instruction is what works best for students, especially special education students, “I honestly think that small group instruction or one on one instruction for diverse learners is what works best.”

**General Education Teacher, 0009.** Teacher 0009 reflected on how personalized learning helped build positive relationships with students and teachers and helped boosts the student’s confidence. In turn, this motivated the students to perform better academically. This teacher believed, “Consistently meeting with students creates a bond between teacher and student that intrinsically motivates their academic stamina.” This teacher also noted that students are well aware of their academic struggles. These struggles motivate the students to do better. This teacher said,

> What I noticed most about their group is their drive to be successful and the boost of confidence they gain every time we meet. These students are also aware that based on the grouping and Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) that they are low academically and would like to be challenged, but most of all, they want to switch to another group.

Teacher 0009 also realized that preparation is one of the major factors needed for successful personalized learning.

> However, the lesson here is that I HAVE to pre-read every piece of text before I put it in front of students and answer the questions. When I do this, the lesson flows much better, and no time is lost. I also realize that not every time will be perfect. I may not always be prepared as to HOW well the lesson will be retained BUT being prepared is 95% of the
battle. And again, being prepared is backward mapping, what I do with my whole class lesson plans. I just realize the small group is NO DIFFERENT.

Finally, this teacher feels that personalized learning can become overwhelming with the amount of time and effort required for students of varying levels “With having to manage small group instruction every day and their progress varying, it becomes difficult to manage.”

**General Education Teacher, 0010.** Teacher 0010 believed that consistency is vital when it comes to personalized instruction. This teacher reflected on a small group after personalized instruction was implemented and felt as though personalized learning worked, but student retention decreased if the student did not have opportunities to work with the content continually. The teacher wrote,

This day of personalized instruction let me know that these scholars can do the work, they just struggle with retention because they aren’t given enough practice on one standard at a time. This lesson consisted of the same steps/methods as last week, but because of regular curriculum lessons and how random and different they are, this is my scholars’ first time seeing this since we last met. Their minds have been filled with so many different things. The positive data from last week is the exact opposite this week 5/6 either got all problems incorrect or had only one correct. One scholar received a perfect score again.

Teacher 0010 also reflected on how frustrating it is to have someone else create personalized learning groups based solely on student test scores when students are cognitively different, which makes the teacher’s job more difficult. Time also becomes a factor with the success of personalized learning. This teacher felt as though time played a factor in the success of all students. Teacher 0010 wrote,
The unfortunate part of this particular group is the fact that although their test scores were similar which qualified them for this extra help, they are on so many different levels cognitively. Having a limited amount of time to be with this group hinders me from being able to effectively help on the particular levels needed and not just what I’m asked to teach based on their scores. Very frustrating. Correct answers improved today, but not by 100%.

**Composite Textural-Structural Descriptions**

Based on the individual textural and structural descriptions, the final step of data analysis is to present a composite description of the meanings and essence of the experience for the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher presented a final analysis of the culmination of data from the initial and follow-up interviews and the reflective journal entries in response to the study’s three research questions.

Research question 1 asked, *How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?* The themes for this research question include: (a) comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, (b) critical need for personalized education, (c) levels of knowledge and understanding, (d) motivation to move away from traditional methods, and (e) stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation. Research question 2 asked, *How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?* The themes for this research question include (a) friendliness of implementation and management, (b) significant barriers, (c) beliefs about teaching content without personalized instruction, and (d) effectiveness when integrated into normal routines. Research question 3 asked, *What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?* The themes for this research question include (a) journal observations and insights and
(b) enhancing achievement.

The researcher formed the composite textural-structural descriptions from the findings of the textural-structural descriptions and condensed them into themes that represent the essence of the phenomena as experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher established these composite descriptions to present a summary of the lived experiences of the participants, based on their interview and journal transcriptions.

**Research Question 1**

Research question 1 asked, *How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?* There were five themes related to research question one. The themes for this research question include: (a) comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, (b) critical need for personalized education, (c) levels of knowledge and understanding, (d) motivation to move away from traditional methods, and (e) stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation.

**Effective and Ineffective Features**

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was the comparison of effective and ineffective instructional features of personalized instruction. Eight of the participants described the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of small group instruction for students. Special education teacher 0001 thought that teachers could reach students more directly in a small group as opposed to whole group instruction. Special education teacher, 0003, had mixed feelings about small group instruction. This teacher commented:

Well, I think small groups work for some students. I think if teachers take them where they are functionally functional performance the level and then build from there however a lot of times teachers don’t want to do small groups or individualized teaching
everybody wants to do this whole group but you’re missing so many students that way because everybody doesn’t number one learn in the same way everybody is not performing on the same level so I think as a whole we need to do a better job individualizing instruction where kids can be successful.

Teacher 0006 noticed success when implementing personalized learning with small groups from students who usually weren’t the highest performing students. This teacher also commented, “The Student’s response to the small groups has been favorable. Most students prefer small groups opposed to whole group instruction. They feel like they get a more clear understanding of the concepts and individualize support.” Finally, Teacher 0009 felt that small group instruction allows for more personable teacher and student interactions as well as an opportunity for the teacher to learn each student’s strengths and weaknesses, so in turn, each student would receive the extra help needed from the teacher.

Five of the participants felt that another useful feature of personalized learning was that it meets students where they are. Teacher 0001 stated, “I like that you meet them where they are in order to get them where they need to go.” Teacher 0007 responded, “You have to teach the students where they are; that’s number one.” Teacher 0005 thought, “It’s definitely effective because you get to reach each individual child right where their needs are.” Finally, Teacher 0006 said, “I think the parts of personalized instruction that I think are effective is that you’re teaching to the student’s ability level and you are kind of gauging where they are, and you know where you want to take them.” Table 1 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of personalized instruction.
Table 1

*Theme 1: Comparing Effective and Ineffective Instructional Features*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Categorical Variable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Being able to refer to tracking data</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Beneficial use of computer-assisted learning</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of small group instruction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of less effective group work</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting students where they are</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Critical Need for Personalized Education**

The next theme to emerge was a critical need for personalized education. Again, five teachers explained there was a critical need for personalized instruction to meet students where they are. Teacher 0001 spoke on how meeting students where they affect the overall management of the classroom. It is when you meet students where they are behavior issues seem to decrease because students are getting the help that they need at the level in which they need it. This teacher indicated that,

Behavioral problems you know from kids who because they read or work at levels below they interfere with the classroom management, so you have a teacher who’s frustrated about that and then you got kids who want to learn who is on grade level but they’re not getting the attention they need because we’re focusing on the students who can’t read who can’t learn the students who you know have the negative behavior and things like but when you have personalized instruction you’re actually saying okay I’m acknowledging the fact that kids learn differently I’m acknowledging the fact that kids need kids are more than numbers in the classroom I’m acknowledging the fact that kid
one needs me to pull them out set them aside learn and see where they are and then focus and see where they need to go.

Teacher 0008 believed the teacher had to get personal and on the student’s level to reach them. Teacher 0004 said “Well, one of my beliefs is the way we use to teach was not effective. You can’t teach one or all students one way, and the way you can get the biggest bang for your buck with students to be most successful academically is to meet them at their individual needs.” The researcher also concluded that personalized education was needed based on how prevalent technology is on the students of today. Four teachers thought technology was a critical component of personalized learning. Teacher 0008 believed, “Sure well today in the classroom there is the technology that wasn’t in the classroom before students are working with iPads or with Chromebooks so there is more that can be done with students on a personal level.” Teacher 0002 spoke of this generation of students being a video game generation, and computerized personalized learning programs cater to the students in a way that keeps a student’s interest longer than listening to a teacher. Finally, Teacher 0007 said,

> With computers becoming a big thing it is it’s going to be necessary for teachers to utilize that technology in a way that best suits learners but not just leave it up to the technology, but teachers still need to be the main focus of the instruction but the personalized instruction in terms of the technology will be better reinforced because you would have instant feedback versus waiting for a day or the end of the week to get a grade you get instant feedback of what the mistakes are and what you need to do to get better as a student.

Table 2 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on the critical need for personalized education.
Table 2

Theme 2: Critical Need for Personalized Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>n of participants contributing</th>
<th>n of meaning units included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A need to meet students where they’re at</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for teacher desire to be effective</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed based on technology impact</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed but not the only way</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of Knowledge and Understanding

The next theme to emerge was levels of knowledge and understanding. Some teachers have taken classes that help with personalized learning, while other teachers have not. Four teachers spoke on an impacting desire for future education. Teacher 0001 thought,

I feel like having the opportunity to sit in front of kids and actually teach personalized instruction has given me you know the kind of fire I need to see that okay there’s something here that I’m passionate about. There’s something I’m willing to dedicate more of my time to reach more students but also teach teachers how to teach how to you know implement certain strategies into their classrooms to better our students overall.

Teacher 0004 spoke of never having any real training in personalized instruction. This teacher has been self-taught and acknowledged “I’ve never had any formal training in differentiation training because a lot of people don’t really know what it is.” Teacher 0006 spoke of wanting to take additional professional development that helps with personalizing instruction for math. Lastly, Teacher 0010 stated, “I do plan to further my education, and with that, I hope to gain more knowledge on personalized instruction if it is offered in that particular program. I’m not sure how many are open or even privy to the overall being of personalized instruction.”
Next, three teachers spoke of being primarily self-taught, and three teachers spoke of learning how to implement personalized learning from other teachers. Teacher 0002 spoke of being trained on different personalized learning programs as well as reading articles on blended learning. This teacher has even shared this knowledge with other teachers after seeing the success of implementation in the classroom. Teacher 0004 declared, “I really haven’t had any formal training. It’s kind of weird, but it is based on what I know will be best, what I know will be best for my students because that the ultimate goal to teach students what works best for them.” Teacher 0008 spoke of initially not having any formal training on personalized instruction and was just told that small group instruction was a requirement in the classroom. This teacher took the knowledge gained from teaching kindergarten and implemented stations to seventh grade.

When it comes to teaching other teachers, Teacher 0002 spoke of teaching other teachers the importance of personalized learning and how to incorporate it into their daily lessons. Teacher 0004 responded, “Well, I don’t think I’m an expert per se, but I think I’m pretty good with it because I teach to other teachers with it.” Teacher 0006 spoke of not having any formal training on personalized instruction but has asked for support from the special education teacher. I kind of tap into my diverse learning teachers because that’s you know that’s like the way they have been, I guess trained to teach. You know, by creating individualized learning plans for students. So I’ve been relying really heavily on my diverse learning teacher in regards to creating like an individualized plan, at least for my students that are struggling.

Table 3 presents a summary of the data regarding participants’ views on levels of knowledge and understanding.
Motivation to Move Away from Traditional Methods

The next theme that emerged was motivation to move away from traditional methods. Six teachers spoke of seeing personalized learning as a benefit for students. Teacher 0001 spoke of how the entire school is moving away from the traditional way of teaching. This teacher said, “they’re different they learn differently, so you have to teach differently you have to cater to them differently, and I like that we’re finally picking up on that and not seeing it as one child one way one structure and that’s it.” Teacher 0008 believed that every child could learn and found different ways to reach students. This teacher acknowledged, “I just love having fun playing games songs it’s a lot of different ways to reach a child you know, and I am the one to get deep with that child on a one on one basis I wanna get ya I believe that every child can learn.” Teacher 0007 stated,

Going way back to when I first taught probably over 16 years ago as a sub noticing that students weren’t on level and being able to say to the principal I need to do my own thing

Table 3

Theme 3: Levels of Knowledge and Understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>n of participants contributing</th>
<th>n of meaning units included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent school discussion and familiarity</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacting desire for future education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in PD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primarily self-taught</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some coursework/no PD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers learning from teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of implementation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and the principal saying okay do your own thing. Once you realize where students are, you have to, you must teach them where they are, and it’s been a success.

Teacher 0004 spoke of moving away from the traditional way of teaching because students were not growing academically. This teacher said, “I got away from the traditional way of doing that because you don’t see those kids moving, so when you’re individualizing that instruction for them, you begin to see those growths with the students.” Finally, Teacher 0010 spoke of the shift in instructional delivery from the traditional way of teaching after seeing how the lowest group in the classroom grew academically from small group instruction. Table 4 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on motivation to move away from traditional methods.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 4: Motivation to Move Away From Traditional Methods</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorical Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing the benefits to students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stimulating-Maintaining Interest and Motivation**

Finally, the last theme to emerge was stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation.

Eight teachers spoke of students became empowered in the classroom when utilizing personalized instruction, which leads to confidence and improved student performance. Teacher 0008 spoke of how students feel more comfortable in small settings with the teacher as opposed to whole group instruction, which leads to students not feeling afraid to try even if the answer is incorrect. Teacher 0007 declared, “I’ve learned that students succeed because they want to succeed not because they receive anything outstanding.” Teacher 0005 spoke of small groups as a motivation for students who cannot hide behind whole classroom instruction. This teacher said,
“in a small group you can’t hide, so you know you’re kind of motivated to you know to be a part of the group and find some type of success.” Finally, Teacher 0006 stated,

It’s been my experience when you do a more personalized instruction, if you tap into it correctly, just the fact that the students are experiencing success with what they’re working on and if they are able to have some type of creative outlet with it too, it tends to have them really proud of their work and really motivated to want to do more.

Four teachers spoke of the importance of teacher and student relationships. Teacher 0009 spoke of how students feel a personal connection with the teacher in small groups and look for that one on one time with the teacher in a small setting. This teacher believed, “I think it builds a connection and a relationship with the students. I think that is what really makes them want to be a part of a small group having the opportunity to come and have some one-on-one time with the teacher and the learning experience.” Teacher 0010 expressed how it is important to make students feel as though they can achieve anything. This teacher believed,

Not making them feel like an outcast always always always letting them know that you are willing to help them in any way even in their lowest moment where they may be shy or have a fear of asking a question cause they don’t want to feel dumb or they don’t want to feel like they know less than the rest of the kids.

Table 5 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation.
Table 5

Theme 5: Stimulating-Maintaining Interest and Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment leads to confidence and improved performance</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of teacher-student relationship</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, *How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?* The themes for this research question include: (a) friendliness of implementation and management, (b) major barriers, (c) beliefs about teaching content without personalized instruction, and (d) effectiveness when integrated into normal routines.

Friendliness of Implementation and Management

The first theme to emerge from research question two was friendliness of implementation and management. Five teachers felt that assessing personalized instruction was teacher and student-friendly. Teacher 0001 felt that personalized instruction helps the teacher as well as the students. This teacher reflected on how small group instruction helps the teacher as well as the student work on the skills that those particular student needs when dealing with other factors such as attitudes and personalities. Finally, this teacher stated, “it is teacher-friendly because it allows me to give a little part of me to each individual student at the exact same time.” Teacher 0002 said, “teacher-friendly most of them are probably if I had to rate 1–10. I would say most of the personalized learning mechanisms are teacher-friendly are probably about a 7.” Finally, Teacher 0004 believed:
It’s teacher-friendly because that’s our whole purpose is to make sure that our students are academically successful, so you kind of get no even a rush but you get a sense of relief like oh my god my students are finally getting it because you begin to see those students at the lower level make those gains, so that’s like a success for you, so that’s why I feel like its effective to have personalized teaching.

However, five teachers felt there were limitations to the friendliness of personalized instruction. Teacher 0002 felt as though when using personalized learning programs, teachers do not fully utilize the entire program because of lack of training. This teacher felt as though there is just enough training given to start a particular program but not enough for teachers to feel comfortable to use the programs. Teachers either choose not to navigate and learn how to use personalized programs, or they do not use them to their fullest potential. Teacher 0005 thought personalized instruction was not teacher-friendly because of classroom sizes. It becomes hard to manage students who are doing independent work. More time is spent managing those students as opposed to teaching the small group that the teacher has in front of them. Finally, teacher 0006 stated:

I think that it is difficult I think that it can be I think that the initial start-up of it can be very time consuming and if you are not like truly tapped into like the various learning modalities of your students if you are not tapped into how to use data effectively I think it can be difficult for a teacher I think that you may need some additional I guess supports around that especially if you’re a novice in that category for teachers who are very I guess very organized with all of the data and know-how to read the data and have the time and the platform to do it I think that it’s definitely a manageable way of instructing their kids and I think it should also I feel like depending upon like what type of classroom
setting you have also plays a role in it as well it may tend to be a little bit easier for a self-contained teacher versus a teacher who may see 150 students per day you know so I really think that all of those factors play a key role in whether or not a teacher is really successfully implementing individualized instructions.

Table 6 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on the friendliness of implementation and management.

Table 6

**Theme 6: Friendliness of Implementation and Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
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<th>n of meaning units included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessing PI as teacher and student-friendly</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations to friendliness</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most friendly for children when both approaches are used</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Major Barriers to Personalized Instruction**

The next theme to emerge was major barriers to personalized instruction. Five teachers spoke of time and resources being a barrier. Teacher 0002 spoke of not having enough proper working technology in the classroom to effectively implement computerized personalized learning programs. Teacher 0004 spoke about the significant amount of time it takes to plan for personalized instruction. Teacher 0005 reflected on materials being a major barrier because so many students are on different learning levels. This teacher declared, “I have to go find books the leveled readers I have to find the things that they need at our school we pretty much have everything that we need but other schools they don’t so then you have other teachers that are paying for stuff borrowing stuff you know.” Teacher 0006 spoke about time and resources is a significant barrier since teaching material is not usually set up for personalized learning. This
teacher thought, “it’s like taking the time to find the additional resources that you can use for the kids to create it. I think the time is the biggest thing, time, and resources.”

Next, two teachers spoke of experiencing teacher pushback. Teacher 0001 believed:

I don’t know if these are like big challenges, but sometimes you get a little push back from some teachers and some administration as far as kids not contributing all of their time to the routine of the classroom, so certain classrooms have different routines when this has to be done in this block, and this has to be done in this block and you still have district requirements these kids need to meet and when you devout or dedicate too much time to personalized education it’s kind of like you’re taking away from that time.

Teacher 0003 pushed in the classroom and spoke of how there is still a lot of whole group instruction happening during these push-ins and believes that teachers don’t want to implement small group instruction into their normal routines.

Finally, two teachers spoke of having too many mixed classes. Both teachers felt as though students become overlooked by having so many students on so many levels because it takes more time to reach everyone. Teacher 0001 declared, “Yeah, because you have a group of children advanced versus a sort of kind of not advanced, it takes a little longer to understand a lesson, so that is a barrier.” Teacher 0005 said, “then maybe having classes that aren’t so mixed where you don’t have students who have such a wide range like how do I reach every single one of them every single day.” Table 7 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on major barriers.
Theme 7: Major Barriers

Table 7

<table>
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<th>Categorical Variable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Breaking things down to student level</td>
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<td>Experiencing teacher pushback</td>
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<td>Having too many mixed classes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacts of new students in the mix</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to monitor progress as much as desired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of administration support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and resources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beliefs About Teaching Content Without Personalized Instruction

The next theme to emerge was beliefs about teaching content without personalized instruction. Eight teachers thought it was possible but not effective. Table 8 presents a summary of the data about teachers’ views on beliefs about teaching content without PI. Each of the eight teachers felt that it is possible to teach content without the use of personalized instruction; however, with so many other factors that come into play, it would not be as effective.

Teacher 0001 spoke about classroom issues such as behavior and lack of student confidence because the student knows that they are not on grade level. This teacher feels that the traditional way of teaching could work, but because of these factors, it would take too much wasted time. Teacher 0002 reflected on how she felt as though she could use the traditional way of teaching and still reach every student. However, this teacher realized that there were too many demands as well as students who needed personalized assistance. This teacher soon realized that personalized instruction was the best method for her. This teacher acknowledged, “Okay, so
that’s something I felt for a very long time. I felt that that was true, but now that we have to do so much so much individualized learning for students, I can’t. It’s like I’m not an octopus anymore.” Teacher 0007 stated, “you can teach it, but it’s not going to be effective without the personalized instruction.” Teacher 0006 thought that as a teacher, one would like to believe that teaching the traditional way was adequate. Still, after trying the whole group instruction method, this teacher found that to be untrue as student scores fluctuated and dipped like a bell curve. This teacher said, “I have done like whole group lessons where I felt like okay the majority of the class they got it, but then the data would indicate like a bell curve.” Teacher 0009 spoke of recently realizing the benefits of utilizing small group instruction as opposed to whole group instruction. This teacher believed, “Honestly, I would disagree, but I think only as of this year have my eyes really opened to how SGI could really be done.” Finally, Teacher 0010 had mixed reviews and spoke of how she could reach every student using the traditional method of teaching but only because of her delivery. This teacher thought:

Based off of my delivery, based off of my aggressiveness monitoring, based off of my jovialness. Based off of my openness and willingness to make sure that they got it even if it means spending an extra second with them as opposed to with the rest of the classroom. All of that helps.

However, this teacher also declared, “of course personalized instruction would be helpful.”  

Table 8 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on beliefs about teaching content without personalized instruction.
Table 8

**Theme 8: Beliefs About Teaching Content Without PI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>n of participants contributing</th>
<th>n of meaning units included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible under certain conditions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible but not effective</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Effectiveness when Integrated into Normal Routines**

The next theme to emerge was effectiveness when integrated into normal routines. Four teachers thought it was worth time and investment to pursue. Each teacher had a different viewpoint as to why they thought it would be worth the time and investment to pursue. Teacher 0001 reflected on how it would be beneficial to the student because students are on different levels, and with classroom sizes increasing, this teacher felt as though students would feel more confident to ask and answer questions in small groups. Teacher 0007 spoke of how personalized instruction would be useful if teachers took the time to become more comfortable and knowledgeable in one’s craft to multitask and implement personalized instruction to help the students and school become more successful. This teacher noted “that’s when schools change; that’s when the culture changes; that’s when the climate changes; that’s when you would say scores go up all of that you will see a successful school.” Teacher 0003 thought that implementing personalized instruction would decrease student behavior problems as well as special education referrals. This teacher believed, “I think that would definitely alleviate a lot of referrals number one. It’s individualized, so you’re doing that tier step RTI if it’s done in the classroom with fidelity a lot of these kids would not have to be referred to special education a lot of students would probably be successful.”
Next, two teachers spoke of the highest level of effectiveness when appropriately implemented. Teacher 0009 spoke of how effective personalized learning could be if it were implemented correctly but also questioned if teachers knew how to implement personalized learning properly.

Doing it effectively I think is what matters so I think that’s to me is the biggest kicker is, do teachers know how to effectively do small group instruction otherwise small group instruction in isolation the whole idea is great but if you don’t know what you’re doing then it’s not going to be beneficial.

Teacher 0010 said:

I think that as long as it’s organized properly and we have the right students in those particular groups, I think that it would be effective not only academically but possibly behaviorally depending on the students and the needs that they have. I think that it would definitely affect their grades and it may make it may add a little more work for the teacher, but it may also lighten the load in the general classroom for the teacher using utilizing those groups to assist better whatever students are in need across the board, and that could potentially improve test scores you know data and everything else.

Finally, two teachers reflected on how the school realizes the benefits when using personalized instruction. Teacher 0001 compared how low academically the students are compared to other school districts and how the district knew that it was time to change for the overall success of the students. This teacher noted:

My school has already picked that up. I think it’s intentional the reason why we picked it up because a lot of our kids are way behind. If you put our kids with kids from another school district, they would not compete; they could not compete. So we can’t keep going
on with this traditional way of learning this traditional way of teaching because our kids are too far behind, so now we need something different.

Teacher 0004 also spoke on how the school realized that personalized instruction was needed and is a requirement for the entire school. Table 9 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on effectiveness when integrated into normal routines.

Table 9

**Theme 9: Effectiveness When Integrated Into Normal Routines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>$n$ of participants contributing</th>
<th>$n$ of meaning units included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of effectiveness when implemented properly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a practical approach/rose-colored glasses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School acceptance level sends message to parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School realizing benefits and using PI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth time investment to pursue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 3**

Research question 3 asked, *What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?*

The themes for this research question include (a) journal observations and insights and (b) enhancing achievement.

**Journal Observations and Insights**

The first theme to emerge was journal observations and insights. Seven teachers spoke about barriers to learning. Teacher 0001 reflected on how even small group instruction for personalized learning can become overwhelming for students when there are varying academic levels. This teacher wrote about a particular student who does not academically fit with any of
this teacher’s small groups. This individual student had behavior issues and took a tremendous amount of time reading through a text and struggled with independent work. The teacher recommended one-on-one personalized instruction to effectively teach and reach this student. This student is also receiving this personalized instruction only two days a week. With so many factors surrounding just one student, this teacher must find ways to reach this student as well as the other students in the class. Teachers 0003 and 0008 spoke of how whole group instruction makes students shut down out of fear of answering a question wrong in front of their peers. Teacher 0008 declared, “they do not enjoy learning with them because they are afraid of what they will say if they get an answer incorrect” and Teacher 0003 stated, “My students expressed to me that they feel more comfortable answering when it is just us in our classroom which upsets me.” Teacher 0002 said, 

In public schools, teachers have to teach students at their grade level, and at their academic learning level, I don’t see any personalized learning tools that do that. Many PL tools test them and teach them where they are but not where they should be, which to me is not a bad thing, but in school systems, they won’t tolerate teaching at only one level. Finally, Teacher 0010 spoke on the inadequate amount of time students are given to work on one concept at a time; therefore, students are not retaining information as this teacher said, “they aren’t given enough practice on one standard at a time.”

Seven teachers reflected on the evidence of personalized instruction’s effectiveness. Teacher 0001 and 0008 wrote about student progress after receiving one-on-one intervention time. Teacher 0001 felt as though this is a useful practice for this particular student to master content as this teacher acknowledged, “When pulled for one-on-on intervention time, R is more
attentive, focused and responsible. Personalized instruction for R is more productive during the individually-focused time.” Teacher 0008 noted,

Today I met with my students individually just to give them a little one on one time with me, and they enjoyed it. They were not afraid to answer questions, and I even had one student stop me and ask me to slow down because he was getting lost, and this is something that he doesn’t often do.

Teacher 0003 believed,

I personally feel like personalized instruction when implemented with fidelity works for students. I have seen the progress in my students working in small groups on their level and how they like to learn. We do a lot of hands-on learning, and even when they struggle, they don’t give up; they even help each other. My students are making gains academically, and their confidence is growing.

Finally, Teacher 0009 reflected on how hard the students in the lowest academic group work to not only grow but challenge themselves because they know they are academically low, and so do their peers. This teacher also reflected on how small group instruction has helped this group academically as this teacher noted, “Needless to say, 4 out of 5 students in my low group met or surpassed their goal for spring. So proud of them and the hard work we all put in LBVS (Laugh but very serious).” Table 10 presents a summary of the data about teacher’s views on journal observations and insights.
Table 10

Theme 10: Journal Observations and Insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>n of participants contributing</th>
<th>n of meaning units included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to learning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of PI effectiveness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student goals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enhancing Student Achievement

The last theme to emerge was enhancing student achievement. Eight teachers spoke about the connection of student empowerment to student achievement. Teacher 0001 and 0007 felt as though placing students in small groups with peers who are academically on the same level makes the student feel as though the teacher is acknowledging that the student needs a little extra help and attention, which motivates the student to want to learn. Teacher 0001 believed, “these kids feel like hey I’m learning, I’m reading, we’re reading text that I can read. I’m not feeling defeated being in a classroom reading text that I’m supposed to read, but I can’t read I’m reading text that I feel comfortable with and I feel like I’m growing.” Teacher 0007 declared, “they’re going to understand that you understand whatever it is that they need and I think they’re going to appreciate it.” Teacher 0008 also felt as though small group instruction helped to build student’s confidence as the student can ask and answer questions and not be afraid to find answers independently, even if they make mistakes. This teacher said, “I think it gives students a sense of confidence being taught in a small setting, small groups. I think it gives them an opportunity to be able to get the answer on their own.” Teacher 0004 reflected on how students become comfortable seeing material in front of them that they understand, which boosts their confidence to learn as this teacher thought, “when students are comfortable with the learning and the materials in front of them that builds that confidence.” Finally, Teacher 0010 thought that
personalized instruction motivated the student to participate more in class, as students can get a deeper understanding of the content taught in whole-class instruction. This teacher said, “It definitely contributes in more ways than one as long as its geared toward what they’re learning in a regular classroom it enhances well let me say it motivates them to be able to participate more in class.”

Five teachers spoke about the achievement enhancements for students with disabilities. Teacher 0002 believed that personalized instruction gives students with disabilities tools like repetition and the different learning modalities needed to be successful. This teacher believed, “with learning problems or disabilities; I feel like it’s also a successful tool because it can provide the student with the repetitions that they need; it gives them different modalities for learning.” Teacher 0003 spoke of losing students with disabilities without personalized instruction and in turn, may cause behavior problems in the classroom because they are lost. This teacher felt as though “if you accommodate them and provide instruction at their level with hands-on things where kids learn better from you wouldn’t have these behaviors.” Finally, Teacher 0010 had mixed emotions on students with disabilities. This teacher noted:

I think personalized instruction will benefit them, as well. It just depends on how personal it has to be because depending on their abilities or lack of, they may need more one on one literally without even a small group. They may literally just need one on one. I think it depends on that disability or the need for that student.

Table 11 presents a summary of the data about participants’ views on enhancing achievement.
Table 11

**Theme 11: Enhancing Achievement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variable</th>
<th>$n$ of participants contributing 10</th>
<th>$n$ of meaning units included 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to target areas and learning skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement enhancement for students with disabilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student empowerment connection to achievement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 11 themes identified in the present study answer the three research questions. For research question 1, which asked, “How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?” five themes emerged. These themes are: (a) comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, (b) critical need for personalized education, (c) levels of knowledge and understanding, (d) motivation to move away from traditional methods, and (e) stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation. For research question two, which asked, “How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?” four themes emerged. These themes are: (a) friendliness of implementation and management, (b) major barriers, (c) beliefs about teaching content without PI, and (d) effectiveness when integrated into normal routines. Finally, research question three, which asked, “What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?” two themes emerged. These themes are (a) journal observations and insights, and (b) enhancing achievement.
Evidence of Data Quality

Credibility

Assurance of validity or credibility for any qualitative study, according to Tisdell and Merriam (2016), involves the use of several strategies. For this study, the strategies of triangulation and member checking were used to enhance credibility. The researcher triangulated the data by comparing and crosschecking data collected from multiple interview sessions (initial and follow-up) and through participants’ reflective journals. Member checking, or what Tisdell and Merriam (2016) called respondent validation, involved asking participants to review the tentative findings of the study and to comment on their plausibility.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of research findings (Universal Teacher, 2018). This study collected data utilizing multiple methods. The researcher used triangulation of data, member checking, researcher reflection notes, and rich and thick descriptions in field notes as measures to strengthen the dependability of the data. For this study, rich, thick description was used to describe the setting and participants of the study as well as the study’s findings. In addition to using rich thick description to describe the phenomenon of personalized instruction and to describe the data collection and analysis procedures as well as the findings of the study, the researcher used maximum variation in relation to the population sample because the participants varied in characteristics such as ethnicity, age, years of teaching experience and years of experience with implementing personalized instruction.

Reliability

The researcher can improve the reliability of a qualitative study through the strategies of triangulation, peer examination, clarification of the researcher’s position, and audit trail (Tisdell
and Merriam, 2016). For this study, assurance of reliability involved the construction of an audit trail. That trail included letters of consent as well as the interview instruments and samples of coding in the appendixes of this study. I also maintained a reflective journal, which described observations, thoughts, and emotions about each interview. I also noted the participants’ behaviors during the interview process, how the data from the interviews and reflective journals were collected, decisions regarding interview times and dates, and the collection of the reflective journals in the reflective journal.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter included a description of how the data was collected and organized in preparation for analysis. Following these sections, a description of how the researcher presented the data was coded and categorized. The researcher presented this coding and categorization in relation to the semistructured interviews and the reflective journal entries collected from eight participants who were general education and special education teachers currently implementing personalized learning at the elementary school level.

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the lived experiences of 10 general education and special education teachers and how those lived experiences impacted their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized learning. Eleven themes were generated to answer the study’s three research questions. For research question 1, which asked, “How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?” five themes emerged. These themes are: (a) comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, (b) critical need for personalized education, (c) levels of knowledge and understanding, (d) motivation to move away from traditional methods, and (e) stimulating-maintaining interest and motivation. For research question two, which asked, “How
do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?” four themes emerged. These themes are: (a) friendliness of implementation and management, (b) major barriers, (c) beliefs about teaching content without PI, and (d) effectiveness when integrated into normal routines. Finally, research question three, which asked, “What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?” two themes emerged. These themes are (a) journal observations and insights, and (b) enhancing achievement. In addition to a description and analysis of these 11 themes, the researcher presented strategies that were used to improve the credibility, dependability, and reliability of this study.

Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of the findings concerning the conceptual framework of this study. It will also include a review of the literature as related to the findings. In addition, this chapter will consist of recommendations for future research, recommendations for action, and implications for positive social change in education. The researcher will also present researcher reflections about the phenomenological research process.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Over the years, schools have changed from teaching a variety of age groups in one class to grouping students in classrooms based upon age (Burke & Fried, 2015). What has not changed is teaching pedagogy, where teachers teach students grade-level content in the same manner, and at the same pace (Burke & Fried, 2015). This pedagogy has caused academic achievement gaps in grades K–12 as teachers struggle to meet the diverse academic needs of their students (Burke & Fried, 2015). Current research has revealed that teaching to a one-sized fit all model has become ineffective as students’ academic levels vary (Burke & Fried, 2015). However, every year, student promotion occurs, widening the academic gaps (Johnsen, 2016). Although personalized instruction may be able to meet the needs of all students in the classroom, teachers have faced many problems in trying to implement this pedagogy in the classroom (Horn, 2017).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of general and special education teachers who have implemented or who currently implement personalized learning and how those lived experiences possibly influence their attitudes and beliefs about personalized learning. The participants were six general and four special education teachers, who have implemented or who currently implement personalized learning at the elementary level, in the state of Illinois. I chose participants utilizing purposeful criterion-i sampling because of the knowledge and experiences the participants had with personalized learning (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 50 years old, and the years of teaching experience with personalized learning ranged from 4 to 20 years. During the initial interview, the
researcher reviewed consent forms and assured participants that all responses would be kept confidential. Data were collected to answer the following research questions:

1. How do general and special education teachers describe their lived experiences utilizing the personalized learning model in an elementary setting?

2. How do these lived experiences impact their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction?

3. What are the meanings, structures, and essence of the lived experience of personalized instruction by elementary general and special education teachers?

Phenomenological research describes a phenomenon through the collection of data from lived experiences of individuals who have a direct connection to the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). Through two sets of interviews and the participant’s reflective journals, I obtained the daily-lived experiences of both general and special education teachers who implemented personalized learning and how those experiences shaped their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized learning.

Based upon the collected data, 11 themes emerged to answer the study’s three research questions: (a) comparing effective and ineffective instructional features, (b) critical need for personalized education, (c) levels of knowledge and understanding, (d) motivation to move away from traditional methods, (e) stimulating-maintaining (f) friendliness of implementation and management, (g) major barriers, (h) beliefs about teaching content without PI, (i) effectiveness when integrated into normal routine, (j) journal observations and insights, and (k) enhancing achievement. The study revealed that a combination of these factors aided in the participants’ attitudes and beliefs about personalized learning. Data were analyzed and coded for the use of
the School district that could be used to aid in the development of professional development courses as well as a look at what personalized learning looks like in the elementary classroom.

**Interpretation of Findings in Relation to the Literature**

**Comparing Effective and Ineffective Instructional Features**

Participants in the study shared many different effective as well as ineffective features of personalized learning. The participants spoke about small group instruction, being able to track data, the benefits of computer-assisted learning, and meeting students where they are academically. Teachers 0001, 0003, 0005, 0008, 0009 and 0010 thought that small group instruction was a useful feature, however special education Teacher 0001 noted that “I just think in order to be really effective it’s really important to keep the groups small, so no more than 5–6 students.” Special education Teacher 0008 thought, “One on ones I believe that’s very important and it helps out versus whole group.” Although general education Teacher 0010 thinks that small group instruction is a powerful feature, this teacher also spoke ineffective groups based upon improper formation. This teacher said, “Depending on how those groups are selected, sometimes in my experience, the groups are selected merely on test scores even though everybody tests on a different level. People freeze up with a test, but that doesn’t necessarily say how well they do inside of the classroom on a regular basis.” Although studies have shown various features of personalized instruction, the research from Jacobs (2014) has shown that academically, students are all over the map, which in turn supports the need for small group instruction to meet the needs of all students.

General education Teachers 0002 and 0006 spoke of computer-assisted learning as a useful feature of personalized learning. Teacher 0002 noted, “Okay, so one of the instructional features would be for personalized learning would be computer-assisted learning.” However, this
participant also said, “Well, the computer can be an ineffective feature if the child refuses to go through the program in the way that they need to in order to achieve that particular goal.” Yang et al.’s (2013) study support the views of these participants as the results showed that the experimental group’s scores increased from an average of 80.33 to an average of 84.85 from pretest to posttest when these participants received personalized instruction through an adaptive computer interface system. Aviles and Eastman’s (2012) study also supports the views of the participants as this study found that Technological tools, and online learning management systems, could be utilized to improve Millennials’ educational performance. This study asked students what learning tools they preferred and found that course websites and online assessments are the technological tools they report using most often. The technology tools that business students perceive as most effective include personal computers, laptop computers, course websites, discussion groups, message boards, and online assessments.

General education Teacher 0004 spoke about a useful feature of personalized learning was using data to move students academically. This teacher acknowledged, “One of the things that I find most effective is individualized instruction based off the data directly looking at student’s data scores and deep diving and looking at what best works for them.” Jacobs (2014) idea that data could be used to group students who are academically on the same level, increasing student engagement supports the views of this participant.

General education Teachers 0005, 0006, and 0009 thought a useful feature of personalized learning was that it meets students at their academic levels. Teacher 0006 declared, “I think the parts of personalized instruction that I think are effective is that you’re teaching to the student’s ability level.” Yang et al.’s (2013) idea that when students are interested in the content, as well as the material fitting the student’s needs; students would achieve higher academically than the
traditional teaching method supports the views of these participants.

**Critical Need for Personalized Education**

Teachers spoke about how there is a vital need for personalized learning because it meets students at their academic levels; today’s students are technologically advanced. Although it is needed, it is not the only way to reach students. Special education Teacher 0001 stated, “when you look at our classes our students are not up to par they aren’t on grade level, so you get a mixture of students in this one classroom who are grades below where they need to be.” General education Teacher 0004 said, “You can’t teach one or all students one way and the way you can get the biggest bang for your buck with students to be most successful academically is to meet them at their individual needs.” General education Teacher 0010 noted, “I believe we need more of it but I think it needs to be kind of organized for lack of a better word in a different way I think we need to meet students more more at their level as opposed to what we may think their level is instead of actually taking the time to assess what their level is.” Jacob’s (2014) study supports the views of these participants as the data proved that students reading test scores increased when the student received personalized instruction.

Special education Teacher 0007 noted that “the set up of the classroom was different and students are different as well in the classroom because almost every student has a cellphone or some form of technology at home today’s classrooms are made to cater to this generation of students.” General education Teacher 0002 commented, “I would say basically looking at the kids that we are teaching by looking at the kids that we are teaching we have a video generation where they love video games they love animated things.” Special education Teacher 0008 revealed that, “With computers becoming a big thing, it is it’s going to be necessary for teachers to utilize that technology in a way that best suits learners.” Teacher 0006 confessed,
I believe that it should definitely be a main component in instruction. I don’t necessarily believe it should be the only way the kids are receiving instruction because it doesn’t it won’t necessarily reflect their educational experiences beyond you know grammar school. Kerns (2013) statement that current technologies are allowing schools to implement this form of education in a manner never before possible supports the views of these participants. Burke and Fried’s (2015) statement also supports the views of these participants that schools have come to rely on technology to support an individualized learning model.

**Levels of Knowledge and Understanding**

The participants shared their levels of knowledge and understanding of personalized learning. The participants shared experiences of professional development, being self-taught or learning from another teacher, years of implementation, and some shared desires for future education around personalized instruction. Teacher 0010 noted, “I’ve had several PDs on it. Well a good handful on it, and I’ve received I guess one on one training every now and then from my principal.” General education Teacher 0009 said, “so initially I didn’t have any it was just like you have to do small groups. We have been doing more professional development actually this year at my school around small group instruction.” General education Teacher 0006 professed,

I kind of tap into my diverse learning teachers because that’s you know that’s like the way they have been I guess trained to teach you know by creating individualized learning plans for students. I’ve been relying really heavily on my diverse learning teacher in regards to creating like an individualized plan, at least for my students that are that are struggling. General education Teacher 0004 stated, “Well, I don’t think I’m an expert per se, but I think I’m pretty good with it because I teach to other teachers with it.” Special education Teacher 0007
admitted, “I’ve had some coursework in differentiation but no personal development about personalized instruction just through coursework.”

Jacobs (2014) and Özyurt et al.’s (2014) statement, “Teachers who are not adequately prepared or trained, may find implementing personalized learning very overwhelming” connects to the above participant statements. Johnsen’s (2016) research also supports the participant’s comments as educators not only need to know what specific practices are correlated to student progress but also how to implement the desired changes so that every student succeeds, including those who are gifted and talented and beyond grade-level content.

**Motivation to Move Away from Traditional Methods**

Some participants shared how seeing the benefits of personalized instruction have motivated them to move away from the traditional method of teaching. General education Teacher 0002 believed,

> With personalized learning I don’t really have to make copies and find all of this additional work for them to practice for the different skills that they are learning or need to learn because it’s already there on the computer so that saves for me like planning time for instruction.

General education Teacher 0004 confessed “I got away from the traditional way of doing that because you don’t see those kids moving, so when you’re individualizing that instruction for them, you begin to see those growths with the students.” The above participant’s thoughts reflect Abawi (2015) statement that the educational system’s one size fits all mentality needs to shift to meet the needs of all students.
Stimulating-Maintaining

The participants reflected on how personalized learning leads to student confidence and improved performance, as well as how personalized learning becomes essential for teacher and student relationships. General education Teacher 0005 believed, “in small group, you can’t hide, so you know you’re kind of motivated to you know be a part of the group and find some type of success.” Special education Teacher 0008 believed, “one on one is like me and that one student or two or three students small group setting where they feel more comfortable in talking and answering, and even if they are wrong they don’t feel as bad you know.” General education Teacher 0006 declared,

When you do a more personalized instruction, if you tap into it correctly, just the fact that the students are experiencing success with what they’re working on, and if they are able to have some type of creative outlet with it too, it tends to have them really proud of their work.

Teacher 0005 stated, “I think for kids these days just the fact that they get to work with the teacher in a smaller setting.” General education Teacher 0009 noted, “It builds a connection and a relationship with the students, and I think that is what really makes them want to be a part of a small group, having the opportunity to come and have some one-on-one time with the teacher and the learning experience.”

Easley’s (2017) research found that a personalized learning environment should encourage learners to manage and be responsible for their learning. Easley found that tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs, and interests, including enabling student choice and voice in what, how, where, and when they learn to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible. Finally, Easley (2017) concluded that programs that support
choice and voice, and just-in-time instruction promote learner agency and empower not only students but teachers as well.

**Friendliness of Implementation and Management**

Participants shared personal experiences with the implantation and management of personalized learning. Participants shared beliefs about teacher and student friendliness, limitations to management, as well as how the friendliest method for students is personalized learning paired with teacher assisted learning. Teacher 0009 stated, “I feel like it’s a whole circle or like teaching process that has to be done in order for it to be effective. Otherwise, you all are just meeting at the kidney table to be meeting at the kidney table, then it becomes less effective, and the term you used less teacher-friendly.” General education Teacher 0006 said, “I think that it is difficult. I think that it can be I think that the initial start-up of it can be very time-consuming.” Special education Teacher 0003 declared, “its teacher-friendly, but is it being really utilized that’s the problem.” Special education Teacher 0007 said, “It depends on the teacher and how they use.” The above beliefs coincide with Jacobs (2014) and Özyurt et al.’s (2014) findings. This study found that the improper training of teachers has a direct effect on the implementation of personalized instruction. The inadequate training causes the time to become a factor when implementing personalized instruction with students who vary academically. Therefore, the execution of personalized instruction can become overwhelming.

**Major Barriers**

Participants shared their insight with what they believed to be the significant barriers to personalized learning. The participants spoke about administrative directions based on old data, experiencing teacher pushback, having too many mixed classes, the impact of new students in
the classroom, the inability to monitor student progress as much as desired, lack of administration support, and time and resources.

General education Teacher 0010 confessed,

Having students tossed into my classroom who are not regularly scheduled for it, and those students are normally diverse learners (special education), but that kind of goes back to my not knowing what the need is so that effects the overall learning environment, and sometimes it may or may not slow down the teaching process.

General education Teacher 0005 believed, “maybe having classes that aren’t so mixed where there are students who are you know whether it’s based on NWEA scores or whatever where you don’t have students who have such a wide range.”

General education Teacher 0006 stated, “I guess the big push with it so it’s like taking the time to find the additional resources that you can use for the kids to create it I think time is the biggest thing time and resources.” Teacher 0010 noted,

I would say (sigh) being told from I don’t know administration the higher-ups whatever an outsider what I should be teaching to let’s say a small group based off of what they see in old data over what I see on a regular basis that creates a huge problem.

Abawi’s (2015) research supports this participant’s statement. This research found that personalized learning requires support through administration as well as resources (Abawi, 2015). After interviewing teachers, Abawi (2015) found that the administration should maintain communication with teachers to find out what supports are needed in the classroom to implement personalized instruction effectively (Abawi, 2015).

General education Teacher 0009 confessed, “I think time is my biggest one, and I believe that it’s time because I have a mandated curriculum that I have to use and that curriculum lends
itself to be long.” General education Teacher 0004 declared, “Well, I said one of the things is the planning in order to have personalized instruction you have to plan plan and plan again.” Again, Jacobs (2014) study stressed that time becomes a significant factor when planning for students who are on varying academic levels.

Special education Teacher 0003 stated, “I don’t think they really want to entertain that small group of personalized instruction it’s like I’m giving it to you, you better catch it if you can if not oh well.” Pane et al.’s (2017) study support this teacher’s views. This study found that teachers felt constrained by grade-level content expectations and high-stakes testing. When these factors came into play, teachers began to focus on mandates instead of focusing on what best worked for the student.

**Beliefs about Teaching Content without Personalized Instruction**

Participants shared their views about teaching content without personalized instruction, and while some thought it was possible under certain conditions, others thought it was feasible but not effective. Teacher 0010 believed, “I am able to do it effectively; of course, personalized instruction would be helpful, but I am able to do it.” General education Teacher 0005 said, “I can do that without personalized instruction now will all of my students in my classroom understand or grasp as fast as others no.” Special education Teacher 0003 acknowledged, “Well, I wouldn’t be able to do that because again every child does not learn the same way.” Bahçeci and Gürol’s (2016) study supported the above participant’s beliefs as this study thought there would be no significant difference between students receiving instruction utilizing personalized instruction versus students receiving instruction using the traditional teaching method. What the study found was students in the experimental group mean scores were 29.28 pretests and 36.25 posttests, and control group mean scores were 28.92 pretests and 33.14 posttests. The difference between post
scores for both groups was a significant difference of 3.11 points. There was a significant difference of 6.97 points in the experimental group from pre to posttest and 4.22 points for the control group. There was a 3.11 insignificant difference found in favor of the experimental group in the mean of the posttest results.

Effectiveness When Integrated Into Normal Routine

Participants spoke about the efficacy of personalized instruction when integrated into regular routines. The participants shared their thoughts of the highest level of effectiveness when appropriately implemented, how school acceptance sends a message to parents, how it is worth the time and investment to pursue, and school-wide realization of the benefits of implementing personalized instruction. Teacher 0010 noted,

I think that it would be effective not only academically but possibly behaviorally depending on the students and the needs that they have. I think that it would definitely affect their grades, and it may make it may add a little more work for the teacher, but it may also lighten the load in the general classroom for the teacher.

General education Teacher 0006 thought, “I think that the time that you put in on the front end will actually expedite you know the material and content you know in the classroom.” The participant’s statements coincide with the results of Abawi’s (2015) study, having the support of the entire school will help teachers feel more comfortable throughout the process of personalized instruction.

Journal Observations and Insights

In their journals, participants shared their beliefs about the barriers to personalized learning, evidence of personalized instruction effectiveness, and how personalized instruction helps students master academic goals.
General education Teacher 0006 admitted, “I found out with personalized learning, it is time-consuming on the front end. It takes hours to process the data and organize resources beyond the online computer-based digital learning pathways.” General education Teacher 0010 noted, The unfortunate part of this particular group is the fact that although their test scores were similar which qualified them for this extra help, they are on so many different levels cognitively. Having a limited amount of time to be with this group hinders me from being able to effectively help on the particular levels needed and not just what I’m asked to teach based on their scores. These participant’s statement reflects Jacobs (2014) thoughts that time becomes a factor when trying to meet the demands of all students who are not all on the same educational level.

General education Teacher 0002 believed, If most teachers focus more on personalized learning and not core instruction, students will fall behind because they may never be exposed to higher-level learning. In public schools, teachers have to teach students at their grade level, and at their academic learning level, I don’t see any personalized learning tools that do that. Pane et al.’s (2017) study support this idea. This study concluded that a separate time for individualized student support was much more common than competency-based progressions. Teachers felt they needed to teach grade-level content that was aligned to standardize testing instead of allowing students to work at their own pace (Johnsen, 2016).

General education Teacher 0002 also said, Personalized learning would also need some type of common understanding and professional development. At this time, there are so many definitions of PL. I agree! I agree mainly because I have been left to come up with my own understanding of this concept.
Horn (2017) found that there were too many definitions of personalized learning which support this participant’s beliefs.

Special education Teacher 0003 said, “My students expressed to me that they feel more comfortable answering when it is just us in our classroom, which upsets me.” General education Teacher 0004 acknowledged, “When I started personalizing instruction to fit everyone’s needs, that is when I noticed student growth.” Special education Teacher 0001 said,

A personalized instruction plan was given to him in December, where he significantly showed signs of growth. This plan included spending more time away from class and being pulled for one-on-one sessions. In each session, he showed signs of phonetic growth, and his comprehension slowly inclined.

The findings of Waldrip et al. (2016) study support the views of these participants.

Waldrip et al. (2016) found that learning is personalized when the learners are motivated to learn because they view the learning task/experience as being engaging and meaningful and as directly addressing their immediate or long-term learning needs. The motivation for this learning could be intrinsic, extrinsic, or both. There is a need for a coherent collaborated approach to address the needs of students of low socioeconomic status. The emergent model indicates that there are no quick fixes and that many of the scales interact to influence student perceptions. The results from this study found that although the emotional engagement was not significantly associated with academic efficacy, self-directed learning readiness, cognitive engagement, and perceptions of assessment tasks/assessment learning were all positively related to educational efficiency. On the other hand, the learning environment negatively associated with academic effectiveness, which, in turn, positively contributed to student well being. Whereas the learning environment was directly positively associated with student well being, emotional engagement
was directly negatively associated with student well being. Also, significant positive correlations existed between the exogenous variables (Waldrip & Prain, 2016).

**Enhancing Achievement**

Finally, participants shared how personalized instruction improves student achievement because teachers can target areas and learning skills; student empowerment connects to student achievement and how personalized learning enhances performance for students with disabilities.

Special education Teacher 0003 noted, “When it’s not used, they are lost they are absolutely lost.” Special education Teacher 0003 said, “you can build from where they are and provide success with the accommodations and modifications with the teaching kids can have some success.” Special education Teacher 0008 said, “I think it gives students a sense of confidence being taught in a small setting small group I think it gives them an opportunity to be able to get the answer on their own.”

General education Teacher 0010 believed, “I think as long as the particular disability or issue is assessed correctly, and we know what it is, and we know whether or not we can help them, I think personalized instruction will benefit them.” General education Teacher 0009 acknowledged, “personalized instruction does help with student achievement because you’re able to target areas that or learning skills that you can’t get in a whole group instruction if you’re doing grade-level learning.” General education Teacher 0006 declared, “I feel that the students it kind of like hones in on like some of the deficits for them and then it allows them to basically it allows them to grow a lot faster when I’m able to do it successfully.” General education Teacher 0005 believed, “personalized learning for anyone is a plus even those who are diverse learners or different learners then how I’m teaching you is based upon how you learn and not other people in the classroom.” General education Teacher 0004 stated, “always I think it definitely contributes to student
achievement because as I said before, they’re able to learn at their level so when students are comfortable with the learning and the materials in front of them that builds that confidence.”

The findings from Yang et al.’s (2013) study support the beliefs of the above participants as this study found that when students are interested in what they are learning as well as material fitting the student’s needs, students achieve at a higher level than the traditional model of teaching. This study’s results were the experimental and control group showed no significant difference in the pretest.74.38, 77.34. However, the experimental group who received adaptive instruction based on cognitive as well as learning styles scored significantly higher on the posttest.84.85, 80.33.

**Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 supports the 11 themes that emerged throughout the study. Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory enhances the findings of the study as participants documented their daily-lived experiences when implementing personalized instruction. Through the participant’s lived experiences, the participants discussed how individuals learn differently and are on varying academic levels. Therefore, these factors have caused the participants to alter their teaching pedagogies. The participants realized each student possesses multiple intelligences ranging in different strengths (Gardner, 2011).

**Individuals Use Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory to Make Sense of Information**

Gardner (2011) suggested that individuals use multiple intelligences simultaneously to make sense of information once it is taken in. General education Teacher 0002 said, “I feel like it’s also a successful tool because it can provide the student with the repetitions that they need. It gives them different modalities for learning lots of visual, auditory, and repetition for them, so I think it definitely enhances their way of learning.” Special education Teacher 0003 believed,
“every child does not learn the same way in order to meet the needs of each student you have to find out how they learn again where they are academically performance level and build from there.”

General education Teacher 0004 thought, “creating groups as well as activities that are shown to their learning styles not just learning styles but their learning levels that’s one of the best things that I know works with the students.” General education Teacher 0006 stated

I like the fact that when you do more personalized instruction, you can kind of teach to the student’s learning modality. So some students are really graphic, they like pictures, they like to draw. Some kids like visuals. Some kids tend to prefer straight up like notes like paper-pencil. So when you know like the kid’s learning style, when you’re doing individualized instruction, you can kind of design your activities around what the kids tend to gravitate to in regards to their learning style.

When Students are Given Multiple Vantage Points to Make Sense of Information, they Achieve Academic Success

Gardner (2011) suggested that individuals possess all nine intelligences in different strengths. When teachers present content in a variety of ways using the intelligences, students are given several vantage points for academic success (Davis et al., 2011). Special education Teacher 0007 noted, “If students are just taught rote material according to a curriculum, according to a map, they’re not going to be successful. You have to teach the students where they are; that’s number one, and I’m sure plenty of research has shown this.” General education Teacher 0006 believed, “when you do whole group instruction or if the instruction isn’t necessarily personalized, it kind of sometimes it’s a hit or miss.” General education Teacher 0004 professed

Well in my classroom that means that I am looking at student data, and from that data I am creating groups based on student ability but I am not just thinking about their ability but
how they like to learn so within those groups I am giving students I’m giving students several ways to learn hands-on, using manipulatives, different colored markers for my visual learners like I try to create an atmosphere for them where they want to learn and can learn based on their abilities.

**Educators Must Decide Which Means Can Best be Mobilized to Help Individuals Attain Desired Competences**

According to Gardner (1983), individuals responsible for educational planning must decide which means can best be implemented to help individuals attain the desired content. General education Teacher 0005 thought, “the lesson has to be personalized to fit the needs of all the students in the class, and that’s when small group instruction has to happen.” General education Teacher 0004 stated, “we’re still doing the traditionally where everybody gets the one-sized fit students are not making gains in that manner.” Special education Teacher 0003 declared,

> Everybody wants to do this whole group, but you’re missing so many students that way because everybody doesn’t number one learn in the same way everybody is not performing on the same level so I think as a whole we need to do a better job individualizing instruction where kids can be successful.

General education teacher 0001 believed,

> Just because it’s tradition doesn’t mean that it’s the right way especially with times are changing now we need to with intent and breaking it down like this giving kids the opportunity to be in these groups with other kids who learn the way they learn not teaching kids the same way personalizing their instruction it’s effective it has no way to be effective this is the same kind of teaching that needs to go on at home with a child with a parent with their children you don’t teach your child each child the same way you teach them
differently because they have a different mind they have a different way of thinking they have a different way of believing and taking in that information so you have to take all of those things into consideration and it is it has shown to be effective.

Ultimately, all 10 participants agreed that their daily-lived experiences when implementing personalized instruction in the classroom shaped their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction. Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory and his concept that individuals possess all nine of the intelligences in varying strengths radiate throughout the findings in this study. Participants documented both positive and negative beliefs towards personalized instruction based upon their experiences relating to: How individuals use Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory to make sense of information; When students are given multiple vantage points to make sense of taught information academic achievement increases and; How educators must decide which means can best be mobilized to help individuals attain the desired competence.

**Implications for Social Change**

This research gave a voice to 10 educators to express both positive as well as negative experiences with personalized instruction. This study also revealed the importance of listening to both the general as well as the special education teacher regarding their lived experiences with personalized instruction. Professional development courses that demonstrate the practical application and implementation of personalized instruction models, as well as best practices, may promote social change as this training may allow educators to feel, perhaps, more confident and prepared to teach students with the personalized instructional model.

Finally, these findings support social change by revealing that both groups of teachers have varied attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion. Although these may vary, all participants in
the study concluded that with the proper training, time, and administrative supports and 
cohesiveness amongst staff, personalized instruction could be successful. By implementing these 
supports, social change may occur, as general education teachers may be more receptive to 
implementing personalized instruction into the general education classroom as the special 
education teacher implements personalized instruction in the special education classroom. 
Additionally, special education teachers may see their role in the general education classroom 
setting as more than just a disciplinarian and paraprofessional, but that of a co-facilitator who 
shares equal responsibility with the general education teacher in the academic achievement of all 
students.

**Recommendations for Action**

When discussing recommendations for action, this study contributes to the field of 
education and the phenomenon of personalized instruction as the study sought to explore the lived 
experiences of both general and special education professionals who have or are presently 
implementing personalized instruction. Data in this study revealed that varying attitudes and 
beliefs regarding personalized instruction exist amongst general and special education teachers. 
The study showed that administrative support, positive relationships amongst teachers and 
student, professional development opportunities for those educators who teach personalized 
instruction, and ultimately the educator’s commitment to educating students with this educational 
model are critical to its successful implementation. Current research supports these findings as the 
data from this study can be converted into an application, which could result in widespread 
benefits (University of Skovde, 2016).

The findings of this study can support local policymakers such as school boards, 
superintendents, and principals in the creation of personalized instruction committees comprised
of both general and special educators. These committees could design and disseminate information through professional development courses that focus on effective practices and training when implementing personalized instruction that discuss the roles and responsibilities of both the general and special education teacher who teach using the personalized instruction model. Additional training may also be provided at the building level for administrators to assist them in the implementation of personalized instruction in their buildings. Research reveals that for educational stakeholders to make informed decisions, stakeholders must understand the effects of the various features of the educational system (Gardner, 1983).

Participants in the study also noted that cohesiveness amongst the general and special education teachers is critical in the successful implementation of personalized instruction, as the special education teacher has been trained to create individualized educational plans for students. An additional recommendation would include administering a personalized instruction survey to individuals who are being paired to teach utilizing the personalized instruction model. This survey may be beneficial to minimize potential conflicts that may arise between the general and special education teachers in regards to knowledge of personalized instruction as well as individual attitudes and beliefs towards personalized instruction. These findings could be disseminated to school administrators when determining what educators are most compatible with teaching personalized instruction.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

School districts that are experiencing difficulty implementing personalized instruction may want to explore research regarding the effectiveness of professional development in the areas of personalized learning and the impact these training have on teacher preparedness. These findings could also promote school districts to conduct longitudinal studies exploring the effect of
the whole-school implementation of personalized instruction and the impact it has on student achievement. Districts may also want to conduct studies measuring the effectiveness of personalized instruction support groups with first-year implementing teachers.

This study could assist educational policymakers in the creation of a comprehensive, personalized learning model across the country. This study may also encourage quantitative studies in which the researcher administers personalized instruction surveys to various parts of the country and compare and contrast the data based upon geographical locations. Lastly, the findings from this study may promote additional research in regards to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the daily-lived experiences of students who receive personalized instruction.

**Researcher’s Reflection**

As a general education teacher, I was motivated to conduct this study due to the students’ mixed learning abilities and academic levels in the general education classroom. These reasons prompted me to embark on this adventure. As the primary instrument for data collection, I sought not to force my personal bias or beliefs on the participants. Throughout the data collection process, I made an effort to be conscious of my verbal as well as my nonverbal cues such as my voice inflections, facial expressions, and body movements when participants responded to the interview questions. Through these interviews and journal entries from both groups of educators, I was able to analyze their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction through their personal experiences.

The interview process was an opportunity for me to hear the participant’s thoughts and feelings about personalized instruction. Many of the participants discussed their successes, frustrations, and disappointments regarding the implementation of personalized instruction in their respective schools. The flexibility of the teachers was motivating, as all of the participants
were very passionate and dedicated to improving the educational outcomes for all students in the classroom.

The journal entries were breathtaking for me, as some of the participants were very straightforward about their daily-lived experiences with personalized instruction. The participants’ entries documented their hopes, frustrations, and disappointments in regards to the overall implementation of personalized instruction in their classrooms. Overall, this study allowed me to explore the phenomenon of personalized instruction through the lived experiences of 10 educators who, daily, strive to deliver optimal services to all students with varying academic levels.

Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter presented a brief overview of the study, the interpretations of findings concerning the conceptual framework and literature review, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and my reflection of the research process.

The purpose of this study was to explore the daily-lived experiences of six general and four special education teachers who have taught or who are currently implementing personalized instruction and how those lived experiences have shaped their attitudes and beliefs towards personalized instruction. Findings from the study reveal that the participants have encountered both positive and negative experiences with personalized instruction. These experiences, according to the results, have contributed to their attitudes and beliefs about personalized instruction. In general, both groups noted that administrative support, time, and effort, having an open mind towards personalized instruction, professional development opportunities, and
knowledge of each student are all crucial components needed to implement personalized instruction successfully.

Although the study conduction was on a small scale, the findings contribute to the existing research, as current research revealed when students are given more control of what and how they learn, as well as content being at level, students achieve at a higher level than the traditional model of teaching (Yang et al., 2013). This data might motivate local school divisions to create professional development opportunities related to useful personalized instructional features. Additionally, school divisions may be induced to develop supports for educators who implement personalized instruction. By developing supports for educators who implement personalized instruction, social change may occur as school districts strive to provide teachers with the appropriate resources they need to teach students using personalized instruction in the traditional classroom environment successfully.

While no one model can solve all the issues related to the phenomenon of personalized instruction, the development and implementation of useful personalized instruction features and teacher supports should be explored more in-depth to improve the overall success of personalized instruction. This study reveals that educators often have difficulty educating students on various academic levels due to the lack of training and support. The findings in this study and current research on the attitudes and beliefs of educators regarding personalized instruction support this idea.
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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Hello Educators,

My name is Valia Thompson. I [redacted] and I am pursuing a PhD in Educational Leadership. I have been given permission to complete my dissertation within the district and I am asking for your help. My dissertation is on: Elementary School General Education and Special Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Study Exploring the Lived Experiences, Attitudes and Beliefs about Personalized Learning. I am seeking the expertise from educators who hold a K–9 teaching license, a bachelor’s degree, and have at least one year of experience with implementing personalized instruction (this could be from small group instruction to response to intervention time). The goal is to recruit at least one general education teacher from each grade level and one special education teacher from each grade band (Kindergarten–2, 3–5, and 6–8), for a total of 10 teachers.

There is little research that documents the essence of the lived experiences of general education and special education teachers who have taught or are currently implementing personalized instruction at the elementary level. This study holds the potential to help fill the existing gap regarding the understanding of those daily-lived experiences of general and special education teachers. This study also holds the potential to reveal how the daily-lived experiences of general and special education teachers have shaped the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs toward personalized instruction.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. There will be an initial and follow up interview that will take place outside of contracted work hours and off the school’s premises at the city’s public library to help keep all participants’ identities confidential. If you are interested in participating please use the link
below to answer some general demographic questions. Once you click the link, type in the code 0819 to complete the survey. I will use this information to assign each participant a pseudonym and set up interview dates and times to collect data to complete my dissertation.

Thank you for your time,

Valia Thompson

Click the following link: [redacted]
Appendix B: Initial Interview Questions For Teachers

1. From your lived experiences, describe several instructional features about personalized instruction in which you believe are particularly effective for teaching. (can also probe here for aspects that were “ineffective”).

2. From your lived experiences with the phenomenon of personalized instruction, what do you believe stimulates and/or maintains student interest and motivation?

3. Based on your lived experiences, what is your belief about the idea that personalized instruction is critically needed to teach today’s students effectively?”

4. Based on your lived experiences, how satisfied are you with the implementation and management of personalized instruction? Is it teacher “friendly” or “unfriendly”?

5. From your experiences, in what ways do you think the use of personalized instruction contributes to or enhances student achievement? What about those with learning problems or disabilities?

6. From your lived experiences with personalized instruction, what are your thoughts and beliefs in which personalized instruction has influenced you to move away from traditional instructional delivery in the classroom or to foster new or different ways of teaching?

7. Based on your lived experiences, what are your beliefs about the idea that the use of personalized instruction would be more effective for students and teachers if it were integrated into normal in-class schedules and routines?

8. Based on your lived experiences with personalized instruction, describe your beliefs to the following statement? “I can teach the necessary content in my classes just as effectively without the use of personalized instruction.”
9. Based on your lived experience, what do you believe are the major barriers that you see regarding integrating personalized instruction into your instructional routines?

10. What do you believe are the levels of knowledge and understanding that you have about personalized instruction based on your lived experiences. Previous formal and informal training? Any plans to do additional development?
Appendix C: Follow-up Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Are there any final comments about your lived experiences with personalized instruction or issues that have not been addressed that you would like to offer?

2. Can you give me more details about . . .

3. What did you mean about . . .
Appendix D: Reflective Journal Instructions

The goal of the reflective journal is to gather as much data as possible about your lived experiences with personalized instruction. You are asked to write five separate entries giving as many details as possible about your experiences with the phenomenon of personalized instruction. These entries can be right after you have implemented personalized instruction or a reflection at the end of the workday of your experiences with the implementation of personalized instruction. There is no limit to how much you are required to write but I do ask that you give as much detail as possible so that I can use this data to get an overall essence of your lived experiences with personalized instruction. I will collect your journal in two weeks at our follow-up interview. Should you have any questions or concerns while writing your journal entries, feel free to email me at [redacted] or you can give me a call at [redacted]. Thank you for your cooperation.
Appendix E: Questions for Member Checking Interview

1. Is the transcript about your lived experiences with personalized instruction complete?
2. Does the analysis accurately describe your attitudes and beliefs in regards to personalized instruction?
3. Is there anything that I misinterpreted?
4. Is there anything you feel has not been included that would further enhance your lived experiences or your attitudes and beliefs with personalized instruction?
Appendix F: 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

Valia Thompson

Name (Typed)

11-25-2019

Date