4-12-2017

Enhancing teacher efficacy and pedagogical practices amongst general and special education teachers

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ENHANCING TEACHER EFFICACY AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES AMONGST GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 21, 2017

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum III, Ph.D.

Dedications

I dedicate this manuscript to my mother, Ms. Phyllis Coleman, without you I would have never been able to complete this project. You showed me what hard work looked like at such a young age. You worked two jobs to ensure that we could have the best life possible. By adopting your work ethic I was able to complete my doctoral studies. You taught me the importance of having God in my life. You also taught me to be humble, be thankful, and to always be appreciative of those who helped me. Your undying support, words of encouragement, and unconditional love has molded me into the man that I am today. There will never be any words that can express how thankful I am for you. All I can say is that by having you as a Mother, I have been truly, truly blessed.

To my son Jahzeiah Coleman, you may not know this but you are the driving force behind all that I do. By working hard I knew that I would be able to provide a better life for you. I dedicate this to you because I want you to know that anything is possible with the right amount of hard work and determination. Never give up on your goals and dreams. Go out in this world and become something great.

Acknowledgments

I have been truly blessed to have the support and assistance of so many wonderful people. Without the help, tough love, and encouragement from others none of this would be possible.

To my committee, thank you for your expertise, time, and support. Dr. James Coaxum III, thank you for being my chair and my mentor. Thank you for constantly encouraging, pushing, and expecting more of me, even when I thought I had nothing left to give. I am forever grateful for your guidance both spiritually and educationally.

Second, my thanks go to Dr. Evelyn Browne, always having confidence in me and giving me the opportunity to complete my dissertation under your tutelage. You gave me a second chance when my back was against the wall and I am so thankful for that. Thank you for being a woman of your word.

Next, my thanks and appreciation go to Dr. Sheree Alexander for always being so willing to assist and encourage my efforts. I could always depend on you to be honest with me and give me the tough love that I needed.

Dr. Fred Bonner, you are the epitome of what a mentor and friend should be. I thank you for your support, through the texts, calls, and e-mails. The advice you gave me is priceless and has helped me immensely throughout this educational journey. You are more than just a mentor, you are family.

I would also like to thank Dr. James Earl for being a source of inspiration for me from beginning. You mapped out my blueprint for success. I am truly thankful for you.

To my father, Michael Coleman Sr. who was unable to complete my educational journey with me, I know that you are looking down on me from heaven and that I made you proud.

To Mrs. Arlene Wilson and Mr. David Wilson Sr. thank you for your support throughout my trials and tribulations. Without you I would not be where I am today and it is because of you that I was able to attend college. I can never thank you all enough.

Last, but by no means least, Lord, I thank you for presenting me with this opportunity and for placing these people mentioned above in my life. I ask that I do what you expect of me with this opportunity, and that what I do glorifies you.

"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required." - Luke 12:48, KJ

Abstract

Michael Coleman
ENHANCING TEACHER EFFICACY AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES
AMONGST GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONTEACHERS
2016-2017
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this action research project was to collect both qualitative and

quantitative data to acquire information in teacher efficacy from the viewpoint of teachers

themselves so that pedagogical practices could be enhanced to better serve the special

needs student population. In this study, the relationship between teachers' perception of

their pedagogical knowledge and beliefs and teachers' sense of self-efficacy was

examined. This particular study was aimed at helping general and special education

teachers understand, develop, and implement pedagogical practices that would increase

their ability to educate students with special needs. The findings from this study revealed

a substantial relationship between the components of teacher confidence in implementing

pedagogical practices and teacher self-efficacy. Implications for teaching students with

special needs are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout school districts across the country, the landscape of special education has shifted over the last two decades (Solberg, Howard, Gresham, & Carter, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1997, 2004) has been reauthorized several times over the past 20 years and with each reauthorization came changes. One of the major changes required educating students in a "least restrictive environment," which, in short, means that students with special needs have a right to be educated with their non-disabled peers whenever possible. The requirement in part was a push for previously self-contained special-education programs to be integrated into the regular education schools and into the regular education classrooms.

Another shift in special education had to deal with the responsibility of general education teachers. Thirty years ago, many general education teachers would dismiss their responsibility for special-education students figuring that special education teachers were the only teachers equipped to work with special needs students (Scull & Winkler, 2011). Today general education and special education teachers often co-teach and have a shared responsibility for the success of their special needs students.

In fact, over 13% of the nation's K-12 student population is identified as having specific learning disabilities (NCES, 2009). The number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services was 6.4 million in 2012–13. And of those students, 35% of students receiving special education services had specific learning disabilities. According to Kolbe, Mclaughlin, and Mason (2007), there has been an increase in the

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number of student referrals, as well as the number of students diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Although a heavy emphasis has been placed on the success of the student, a strong focus has also been placed on teachers and how they impact students in special education programs (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sandler, 2007; Rockoff, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2002). Research studies have shown that the implementation of effective instruction that supports teacher self-efficacy directly impacts and promotes the success of special education students. Research has shown that teacher efficacy has a significant impact on students in the classroom, specifically on student achievement, student motivation, and student efficacy (Henson, 2001). Because teacher self-efficacy has been shown to be related to many positive classroom outcomes, researchers have turned toward investigating the origins of teachers' efficacy beliefs for important insights about how to foster self-efficacy during teacher training.

Additionally, teacher efficacy has been extensively researched since it was first introduced in 1977. The concept, based on Bandura's cognitive theory of social learning (1977, 1982, 1994, 1997), refers to the premise that a teacher can produce desired outcomes in his or her students. Studies have shown that preservice preparation experiences are a fundamental part in the development of teacher efficacy and aids in boosting teacher confidence, teacher retention, and helps teachers develop essential knowledge and teaching skills (Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005). Teacher efficacy has also been found to be a stable and crucial indicator of teacher motivation and practice (Pohan, 1996), teacher receptivity to innovative strategies (Guskey, 1998), student motivation (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), and student success (Bandura, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Moreover, extensive research has also shown that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy spend longer time periods instructing students compared to those with lower levels of self-efficacy (Klassen, 2010a). When placing special education teachers with high levels of personal teacher efficacy (PTE) side by side with teachers having lower levels of personal teacher efficacy (PTE), the teachers with higher PTE met their performance goals more frequently. Subsequently, these teachers were exceedingly more confident with regard to motivating students as compared to the teachers with lower PTE. Conversely, Katsiyannies, Zhang, and Conroy (2003) discovered that special education teachers with low levels of self efficacy believed that they did not successfully handle students' challenging behaviors, resulting in those teachers more likely having additional negative emotional reactions to those behaviors.

Therefore, school administrators must address this challenge by empowering teachers with lower PTE through providing support, addressing role-related issues and restrictive conditions, and enabling professional development. This research study is one step in this direction in that it empowers a group of teachers to improve their instructional strategies for special needs students by improving their PTE. In order to do this, school districts must be prepared to deal with the challenges often associated with teaching special education.

Challenges to Teaching in Special Education

Over the past decade, researchers in special education have examined the complex and distinctive challenges commonly shared by special education teachers (Billingsley, Carson, & Klein, 2004; Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005; Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou, & Garvin, (2009). Some of these particularly pressing

challenges include: stress, motivation, job satisfaction, retention, and general engagement with their jobs. Researchers have also identified several factors in special education settings that play a role in the intricacy of teaching students with special needs. Those factors include: role ambiguity, students posing as complex behavioral and academic challenges, insufficient curricular and technical resources, inadequate administrative support, and excessive procedural demands.

As special educators assume positions in schools, they frequently face ambiguous, conflicting, and fragmented expectations from their colleagues, supervisors, and families of the children with special needs that they serve (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003). Special education teachers also feel that completing special education paper work is confusing and burdensome and that they feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of meeting the procedural demands of the special education bureaucracy (Scull & Winkler, 2011). Dealing with complex behavioral and academic challenges is another challenge for teachers. When working with students with special needs, teachers may have to deal with multiple disabilities within one class. Since each student is a unique case, the teacher must modify their lessons to suit each student with special needs by providing individualized education programs (Rockoff, 2004).

Another barrier for special education teachers is inadequate administrative support. Oftentimes, special education teachers leave their jobs not because of money or stress, but because of the low level of support they received from administrators (Chambers, 2008). Administration fails their special education teachers when they repeatedly remove them from instruction and assign them to conduct assessments, attend meetings, complete paperwork, and work with other educators and the community. This

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can occur when special education programs are not directly linked with general education programs. In order for teachers to have a high level of efficacy and the rate of attrition to decrease, school districts must meet the needs of teachers and students by providing the needed resources for teacher satisfaction and student academic success.

In light of the admirable assumption of good intentions, children in special education are often shuffled to learning environments with less academic initiative, usually as a result of the focus being on emotional and behavioral management (Katsiyannis et al., 2003). Often times, special education programs lack instruction that challenges and develops students' analytical and critical thinking skills (Keogh, 2007). Moreover, these students are positioned to be underachievers. Due to the limitations on accessing general education curricula, the students' educational and social development is repressed. Teachers who are more qualified produce high quality instruction and consequently teachers who are ineffective produce mediocre instruction and mediocre instruction produces mediocre education (Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez, 2004). Therefore, improving instructional effectiveness is crucial in promoting a sense of satisfaction in teachers.

Incredibly enough, students who are placed in a special education classroom, generally enter the class with minimum expectations from their teacher. These students are set apart from the general school population producing a less than positive impact on these students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Dunn, 1968; Harry & Anderson, 1994). Therefore, students with special needs often suffer from negative effects of labeling, stigmatization, lowered expectations, inadequate instruction, and restricted access to

enrichment opportunities. This spatial segregation can be paralyzing (Gay, 2001; Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

In addition, researchers suggest that both general and special education teachers have an implicit teacher bias concerning students with special needs (Hang & Rabren, 2009). An implicit bias is attitudes or stereotypes that are activated unconsciously and involuntarily. A teacher bias often shapes how they think of students with special needs. These thoughts consist of low expectations, low self-perception, and low intellectual success (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005). When teachers demonstrate a lack of sensitivity and understanding towards educating students with special needs, difficulties arise creating a fall-out in the developmental structure of the classroom setting and culture (Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008).

In order to get a firm understanding of students with special needs, teachers must refrain from their attitudes and biases, which hold negative connotations in the development of these students (Brownell et al., 2007). Once teachers embrace special needs students and their abilities, they are able to help these students devise a learning plan enabling higher levels of academic learning (Katsiyannis et al., 2003). Teachers must therefore develop strategies to educate special needs students so they can become productive members of society. Additionally, educators must be mindful that each student requires distinct instructional strategies to address their individualized learning demand. Because of the hierarchy and structure of the public school system, it is imperative for school districts to address and provide for the pedagogical needs of teachers who instruct special education students to ensure that the level of instruction they are providing enables the success of this student population.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods action research-based study was to utilize a professional development model incorporating action research to enhance special education teachers' pedagogical practices and therefore increase their level of self-efficacy. Through teachers enhancing their pedagogical practices they acquire skills and knowledge to adapt their instructional approaches and classroom procedures to meet the needs of these diverse learners.

This study demonstrated that teachers benefitted from professional development enhancing practices and therefore increased their efficacy when teaching special needs students (Delpit, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Within the last decade, a paradigm shift has occurred in the field of education. This shift now focuses on disciplines (subject matter) rather than on pedagogy, the act and or the art of teaching (Freire, 1996). This shift to subject matter is best described with the concept of standardized curriculum context and accountability, teacher and student assessment, and teacher preparation. This process has diminished the sense of what good teaching is all about, no matter what the subject.

Additionally, this study examined implementing nine support mechanisms as an instruction model. Support mechanisms are a teaching model that is based on the premise that teacher instruction should be adapted to fit the needs of the diverse student and individual learner in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2004). Special and general education teachers, who do not practice differentiated instruction, may not be aware of how important it is to the lower level learner. Special education students have their own

learning style and teachers need to teach in a way that accommodates diverse learning styles.

In regards to students with disabilities and the need for improving teacher efficacy, there has been a great deal of discussion based on using principles of universal design and pedagogical practices. Successful teaching practices are being developed as the field of education responds to the needs of the diverse student population (Mintz, 2007). The development of new and innovative teaching methods is responding to and benefiting the needs of both general and special education students. This study was inspired by general and special education teachers who wanted to improve their teacher efficacy and better serve the special needs students in their school. The success of the study was also based on the desire of administration to work collaboratively to empower teachers within the district to make a change (Leech & Fulton, 2008).

Moreover, while some school districts in the United States have recognized the importance of teachers adhering to classroom instruction emphasizing teacher efficacy, others have customarily evaded this issue (Ikegulu, 2009). The practice has been to focus efforts solely on state based assessments and curriculum mandates. Hence, the majority of pre-service teachers in the country are inadequately prepared to provide the vital skills, knowledge, and dispositions to teach students with special need (Helm, 2007). Teachers' use of appropriate pedagogy in the classroom is demonstrated through their ability to differentiate instruction and create a responsive teaching environment, cultivating a competence to make connections with the students. These particular students have different learning needs, different learning styles, and different levels of ability. The

ultimate goal is for teachers to build a relationship with students, feel confident with their ability, and make that connection.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this action research study:

1. What were general and special education teachers' perceptions of their teacher efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs?

2. What pedagogical approaches improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities?

3. How did educators use differentiated instruction to increase academic success for students with special needs?

4. How did my leadership foster the development of teacher efficacy to impact students with special needs?

Significance of Study

This study is significant because of all the extensive research done on the complexities of special education, there still exists a gap in the literature base on the self efficacy and pedagogical practices of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004). This study has added to the body of knowledge surrounding special education teachers and their motivation to instruct students with special needs. This is significant because the researcher can conduct studies, which improve the pedagogical practices in diverse communities by implementing strategies that encourage the development of positive self-efficacy in teachers (Podell & Soodak, 1993), because educators must have the best interest of the special needs students at heart, for services provided by NCLB, IDEA, and the IEP.

This study also adds to the scholarly research and literature in the field of students with special needs and teacher efficacy by merging these two constructs of improving the pedagogical practices and by implementing strategies that encourage the development of positive self-efficacy in teachers. Findings from my study would be important to school districts, colleges, and universities as they prepare preservice and novice teachers for special education licensure. A teacher's level of efficacy is going to have a significant impact on a teacher's effectiveness (Henson, 2001). Teacher effectiveness can be improved through professional development to encourage teachers to think about their teaching in various ways and to keep them well-informed of changes to the world of education, which has the potential to increase efficacy as they indirectly see other teachers being successful with new techniques.

Additionally, this study will help contribute to closing the gap in the research concerning special education teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical practices for students with special needs (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). The results of my research may suggest ways in which to support both general and special education teachers on instructing students with special needs. Furthermore, findings from this study have the potential to be influential for many educational reforms in relation to the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom and the development of qualified teachers who can be effective in inclusive classrooms.

Also, professional development in a general sense refers to the growth of a person in their professional role. Precisely, teacher professional development "is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and systemically examining his or her teaching (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41). The main purpose of professional

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development is to inspire educators to manage their responsibilities from a different perspective, and/or implement new strategies. Effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges (Mizell, 2010). Professional development is not effective unless it triggers teachers to enhance their instruction and pedagogical practices.

That is to say that high performing systems focus persistently on continuous learning with job-embedded professional development when teachers are hired into the profession (Crow, 2009). At the teacher level, these same systems focus on three areas of the classroom: (a) helping individual teachers become aware of their specific weaknesses in their own instructional practices, (b) helping individual teachers gain an understanding of effective practices, and (c) assisting individual teachers in making necessary improvements to their instructional practices.

These three areas are accomplished when teachers have a high level of efficacy and have a strong belief in their ability to make a difference in their classroom and education as a whole. It is assumed that professional development improves teaching practices and student results. However, many schools make no effort to determine the effects of professional development on teachers and students. This study sought to identify whether implementing support mechanisms as a form of professional development, will impact teacher reported self-efficacy.

Definition of Terms

The terms that follow are frequently used in reference to special education:

American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA): Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications

and governmental activities. The ADA also establishes requirements for telecommunications relay services.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Every child with a disability has a right to a public education at no cost to the parent. The child's educational program must be provided in accordance with his/her IEP (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law ensuring service to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million people eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth-2) and their families receive early intervention services under Part C. Children and youth (ages 3-21) receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B (IDEA, 1997, 2004).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written plan developed at a meeting with the IEP Team that serves as the roadmap for the child's education. The IEP must state the child's present level of performance, measurable annual goals, and short-term objectives aimed at improving the child's educational performance, and instructional activities and related services needed for the child's placement. The IEP must be individually designed to meet the child's unique needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: National legislation that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive financial

assistance from any federal department or agency, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). These organizations and employees include many hospitals, nursing homes, mental health centers, and human service programs.

Self-Efficacy: A person's judgment of his or her capabilities based on mastery criteria; a sense of a person's competence within a specific framework, focusing on the person's assessment of his abilities to perform specific tasks in relation to goals and standards rather than in comparison with others' capabilities (Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003).

Special Education: Special designed instruction that is provided at no cost to meet the needs of a child with disability. Special education includes instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004)

Conclusion

On a national level, children receiving additional special needs services are placed in classrooms that are lacking materials, manipulatives, resources, and instructional strategies. The ultimate goal of this action research project was to enhance teacher efficacy and pedagogical approaches that will prepare the students with special needs to meet their IEP goals and objectives.

Special education and all related services enforced by legislation and federal laws provide services for all persons who identify as having disabilities. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, emphasized that students who are classified as having special needs should be placed in classroom settings with the least restrictive environment. In addition, there must be sincere accountability for the development of the students by special

education teachers, a strong community of support, and parental support that is presented with devoted involvement (Bateman, 2010). Each member must establish a goal designed to encourage students to succeed and be accountable. These are the key issues that will create successful change and perhaps close the communication gap between special and general education teachers as well as the communication between students and teachers. Despite enormous daily pressures, teachers are expected to transmit the accumulated knowledge of decades to children of differing backgrounds, abilities, and needs (Kaufman & Blewett, 2012). If we as a nation truly want quality public education, we must pay more attention to the needs and concerns of students as well as teachers. This is how we build and prepare our students to become 21st century learners, which will give us the opportunity to compete against others, collaborate with others, and most importantly, use our critical thinking skills to set us apart from other nations. It is increasingly apparent that not just special education teachers, but general education teachers, as well, must continue to learn about themselves and their own cultures to build bridges of cultural valuing, racial understanding, and human interaction (Tatum, 2003; Zirkel, 2013).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

What is Teacher Efficacy?

In order to understand the conundrum that many teachers face in their delivery and mastery of instruction, it is important to understand what is meant by teacher efficacy. First, efficacy expectation is "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). This phenomonology has prompted many other researchers (Fritz, Miller-Heyl, Kreutzer, & MacPhee, 2001; Klassen, 2010a; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Wolteer & Daugherty, 2007) to conduct studies to examine teachers and their efficacy as it pertains to Bandura's work. According to Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, and Hoy (1998), studies of efficacy by Bandura in the 70s and his theoretical framework regarding self-efficacy are still influential today. Bandura's early work reveals two types of efficacy: outcome expectancy and efficacy expectations.

Outcome expectancy is defined as a person's estimation that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. In fact, the most important concern is close relation. There is a great difference between the expectancy of both "Outcome" and "Efficacy." Quite simply, an individual can believe that actions and practices can generate outcomes (i.e., constant practice will eventually lead to proficient skill); however, if an individual has any doubt about his or her ability to perform with ample satisfaction, then that doubt causes a negative perception and will influence their behavior (Bandura, 1977).

This research narrowed the scope of teacher efficacy and determined accurate perception on the levels of teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1977). When perception levels

based on teachers' efficacy are assessed, levels of understanding the effects of these practices on their students and the school environment is measured. Pertinent to this literature are the effects of the efficacy levels and what will be more effective in helping teachers.

Nevertheless, the literature review is completed with the depiction of teachers' overconfidence. The perception of teachers and their level of efficacy become problematic when "gross overconfidence" is part of the level of teaching. In fact, Jacob and Lefgren (2008), and Naugaret, Scruggs, and Mastropieri (2005), posit that such overconfidence will displace teachers' ability to achieve incentives that will improve their practices or academic content matter. One will then have to ask the question, "If educators require assurance in their teaching, why should they change their style of instruction?" (Bandura, 1977).

Consequently, as a result of teacher preparation programs geared towards heightened efficacy tactics, teachers who completed their student teaching in elementary schools felt much better prepared for actual classroom teaching than those who completed their student teaching in middle or high school (Carpenter, 2007). Students who felt they received significant support during student teaching were more confident during their initial teaching year (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2005). Teachers who had higher levels of self-efficacy had longer student teacher experiences (Klassen, 2010b). According to Gibson and Dembo (1984),

> Teachers who believe student learning can be influenced by effective teaching and who also have confidence in their own teaching abilities, should persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different

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types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations concerning their ability to influence student learning. (p. 570)

History of Special Education

There have been a number of strategies for instructing students with special needs on a national level, yet educators as well as policy makers continue to struggle and have issues related to instruction (Lin et al., 2008). However, under federal and state regulations, the state of New Jersey has a long and proud history of ensuring that people with learning disabilities of all ages are provided with the support, care, and treatment they need to be successful. New Jersey school districts have comprehensive and effective special educational programs as well as services that are committed to making sure that children with learning disabilities are able to be active, life-long learners and productive citizens, and productive workers.

Furthermore, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) states that every child with a proven learning disability should be accommodated within the public school system. However, if a student does not fit the full criteria of the IDEA, then that child may still be able to receive accommodations and modifications through section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL93-112), which protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their abilities. The American Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (PL101-336) which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in public places, transportation, and employment is an additional resource that aides in the protection and rights of individuals with disabilities, particularly, students with special needs.

In addition, these acts are very similar, in a sense, because they both give children with learning disabilities a fair chance to compete with other children who are not classified with a learning disability. This ensures that all children with learning disabilities have available to them a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE). What this does is to make available special education and related services designed to the unique needs of the student and helps to prepare them for higher education, employment, and independent living. Having the necessary funding, resources, as well as the appropriate placement of children with disabilities is essential to special education success in school.

Likewise, it is important for all educators to understand school law when it comes to special needs children. According to Saleh (1999), the rights of the sizeable group of children with special needs of many different sorts require attention. These rights can be defined as just claims that are legally and morally binding on others. It is useful and necessary to consider upon whom each right in question places a claim or imposes an obligation. This helps to ensure that the "rights of the child" will not be reduced to a popular and appealing slogan, when what must obliviously be done is to transform this powerful idea into a program of action on behalf of children.

Special education and all related services enforced by legislation and federal laws provide services for all persons identified as having a disability. The IDEA 2004 required teachers and students in the general education population to include students who are classified as having special needs into a classroom setting with the least restrictive environment. Schools must ensure educational equity and provide the necessary resources, funding, placement, and instructional programs to enhance student

achievement. School leaders must know and understand special education legislation in order to give proper placement of special needs students and implement the services required by the Individual Education Program or Plan (IEP). Special education services are required to ensure the best quality education in the least restrictive environment.

No Child Left Behind

In order to ensure that no child is left behind, students with special needs must receive some form of services through special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Though a fourth of these students fall below the achievement level mean verses half of the general student population, it is still the responsibility of these services to ensure that students are not left behind, due to their disabilities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006). This could be one of the reasons why the No Child Left Behind Act is concerned with the overall academic success and performance of students with disabilities and mandates that schools and districts meet the "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) standards with all groups (NCLB, 2001). AYP is a benchmark to measure the progress of student achievement through a standardized test (NCLB, 2001). However, schools did not meet the AYP standards in 2006 and 13% of students with disabilities failed to reach the standard achievement scores (Soifer, 2006).

Undoubtedly, educational reform is needed to enable new roles and responsibilities for teachers. Jones and West (2009) state, "teachers must be trained to consider all aspects of a student's life in determining what to teach, how to teach it, and

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how you will know when it has been taught" (p. 71). One of the many questions at hand is will students achieve the academic success entitled to them?

Therefore, special education teachers must have the profound understanding of disabilities in order to identify and implement strategies of teaching to increase student learning (Jones & West, 2009). Incorporating these methods will ensure students with special needs have the ability to achieve the success needed for the academic semester and grow to be a competitive member of the school population. The NCLB and IDEA highly encourage teachers to use the resources as tools of instructions to achieve the academic success of each student with special needs by reshaping learning with the additional resources provided (Carpenter, 2007).

Probably, this will enable teachers with the skills and knowledge to have a wide access of information designed to evaluate research and apply the learning tools to instruct students with special needs and disabilities (Jones & West, 2009). Carpenter (2007) noted special education training and quality. Jones and West (2009) identified "The nature and needs of this group of students becoming more complex and challenging" (p. 69).

IEP for Students with Special Needs

There are several tenets or components of special education: the most important tenet is the IEP because it guides the student's educational track throughout the school year. An IEP is an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is vital for individuals with disabilities to be successful in their academic lives. It specifically lays out the plan for student's academic year, gives her measurable annual goals to work toward, and lists all of the related services the student is able to receive.

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IDEA requires an IEP be developed and implemented for every student with disabilities between the ages 3 and 21. The IEP serves as a blueprint for students with special needs and any related services. The IEP is a legally binding document that states exactly why and what special education services the child will receive. It includes the child's classification referring to or pertaining to the specific learning disability, placement, services such as a one-on-one aide and therapies, academic and behavioral goals, a behavioral plan if needed, percentage of time in regular education, and progress reports from teachers and therapists. In addition, the IEP is developed at an IEP meeting which consists of members from the Child Study Team, a social worker, psychologist, learning specialist, and the child's teachers and therapists.

This document is important because it is a means of keeping every part of the student's academic experience uniform. Every educator that works with the student will be following the IEP as written, which is essential for the student's success. In this paper I will discuss what an IEP is, who the IEP members consist of, which goals are in an IEP, the parent's roles at the meetings, and what happens next.

To this end, the special needs teacher should be responsible for implementing the IEP and assuring that a subsequent IEP is developed before the ending date of the previous IEP so that continuous service will be afforded to any identified special needs child. The special education teacher is responsible for maintaining his or her student's confidential records in compliance with all local, state, and federal procedures by initialing and completing any needed information or forms in a timely manner.

The underlying problem is that some children are faced with being misdiagnosed and misplaced into special need classes. When parents or guardians do not respond to the notification that their child may have a disability, the child is then placed in a special needs class as the counselors and teachers see fit. Unfortunately, in most cases the child is not properly assessed or tested to confirm that they indeed have a disability that will be helped by attending special needs classes (Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009). Therefore, the child has not been granted the opportunity to succeed and is unable to learn the necessary skills to be academically successful.

Views of Research Based Practices for Special Ed Teachers

Over the past two decades, research in special education has provided phenomenal information on techniques that would enable better classroom practice (Snell & Brown, 2006; Wendling & Mather, 2009). However, more information must be compiled to effectively provide a greater range of learning. In addition, educators must use research as the tool to enabling and ensuring that methods used to increase learning is not just of the old typical decision-making made at whim by policymakers, administrators, parents, and elected school board representatives. Practitioners must objectively collaborate and use research as the tool to finding what best works for our teachers to teach.

According to Solberg et al. (2012), teachers may perceive differences as problems and react to students' diversity with negative feelings, low outlooks, and assessment procedures. General education teachers must prepare themselves for instructing special needs students while providing an accurate assessment of the situation. While learning skills would aide in the adaptation of teaching diverse students, teachers must ensure and

maintain a leveled playing field for a successful academic year by applying what was learned in these structurally designed programs to establish a greater understanding of these students and the goal setting theories needed to prepare each one (Tatum, 2003). Consequently, school districts and administrators should increase teacher competence by implementing professional development sessions, diversity workshops, focus groups, in-services, and teacher training programs for all teacher. The biases perpetuated amongst teachers who are not academically sensitive to students with IEPs, help create a low expectation for children with learning disabilities that are inaccurate (Lin et al., 2008).

Likewise, it is important to consider the view of the teacher, in order to understand how to sustain and implement classroom practices. We must understand the perception the teacher has towards research, how effective would research be for the teacher and their educational performance with their students, and how will this research information be implemented in their professional development? As Carnine (1997) has suggested, one way to bridge the gap is by putting research-into-practice and increasing the market demand for special education research.

On the other hand, in order to achieve this, practitioners must speak with the greatest consumers of education, and the greatest consumers of education are the teachers. By engaging teachers in conversations about current research, scholars, educators, and researchers can open doors to new and improved forums that are attainable through research and development. These forums will increase the professional development of teachers and begin the improvement of educational practices. Special education research communities engage in two methods of research and practice: (a) by forming communities of learners to reflect and enact changes in practices, and (b) the

lack of research-based practice implementations. The objective of the ongoing research is to be used for professional development to educate teachers in their research practice and ensure improved classroom practices. New methods and models have been designed to ensure new ways of teaching and providing instruction that enable academic success and higher levels of performance from special education teachers and special needs students.

Current Trends in Special Education

The consult teacher model. A consult teacher delivers services to aide special needs students by linking special education services to students with special needs whereby the special education teachers, general education teachers, parents, and other professionals collaborate to reduce or limit the use of pullout for special education services (Haight, 1984; Idol, 1986; Idol-Maestas, 1983; Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1986; Lilly & Givens-Ogle, 1981; West & Brown, 1987). This model has gained high levels of attention within special education literature and offices of education in the 80s. Consult Teaching is known as

> A process for providing special education services to students with special needs, in which special education teachers, general education teachers, other school professional, or parents collaborate to plan, implement and evaluate instructions conducted in the general classrooms for the purpose of preventing or ameliorating students' academic or social behavior problems. (Idol, 1986, p. 2)

The consulting teacher model broadens the services needed for special education students and ensures availability in the most appropriate environment for the student, while supporting those students capable of entering a functional classroom and the ability to be educated in a conventional classroom setting (Dugoff, Ives, & Shotel, 1985). This model

filled a need resulting from the unprecedented numbers of low achieving students, the steady rise in the mislabeling of students as handicapped, and special needs services unavailable for other special needs students who are not labeled. In addition, this model has been recognized for its abilities to transform regular/special education at the federal level, which creates greater involvement with the underachieving students (Will, 1986a, 1986b).

The interest in this model is based on the reality that special education budgets are costly to sustain and state administrators must look for ways to cut costs or contain the cost of special education. In essence, what makes this model so attractive is the economic reality that special education budgets are generally larger to the extent that it is cost prohibitive. Accordingly, the presumption is that this consulting model of service is a more cost effective manner of service delivery to special needs students because the consulting teachers can reach more students in need of special help than pullout teachers, and because it also eliminates the need for extra physical space to service the special needs student.

Moreover, if consulting teachers can effectively reach more special needs children, then this will aide in the restructuring of programs for special needs students while dismissing the need for pullout teachers. This model is not only designed to assist the special needs student. This model also benefits the non-disabled student because in this least restrictive environment, the non-disabled student as well as their families, become more thoughtful of the needs of others, which translates into the ability to learn to appreciate individual difference. It creates an overall environment of inclusiveness for

the special needs student as well as the non-disabled student, which helps the students to learn to work together cooperatively.

It is time to push the stimulus of change into the now and highlight the Consulting Teacher Model as an effective way to meet the needs of our low achieving students and their special needs. The consulting teacher model is a result of the movement to expand the continuum of services for students with special needs (Huefner, 1988). Subsequently, services are available to these students in the least restrictive environment.

Teacher expectations. Teachers' flawed expectations, which sway the performance of students, shed light upon the notion that disparity of treatment contributes to the achievement gap among students with special needs in school (Ferguson, 1998). This is a bleak insight as each passing year finds the number of special needs teachers becoming fewer in number and having a difficult time instructing low level learners in today's schools (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008).

Ikegulu (2009) suggests, teachers' attitudes and belief system impact how they relate to their students, which directly affect student academic achievement. Teachers often treat students with special needs differently than general education students (Aronson, 2004). Teachers also should be conscious of the lens they are using to view students. Teachers need supportive methods in providing integrative strategies and practices to enhance cultural responsiveness related to the classroom setting, student and family engagement, access to academics and general education curriculum, and a flourishing pedagogy. In essence, the diversification of the teaching population in the field must reflect more the population of the student body.

According to Gay (2001), it is crucial for teachers to deeply examine conditions based on beliefs that effect diversity, needs, and expectations. The ultimate goal is to create optimal use of academic learning strategies to increase student ability, reinforce strengths, peak interest, and achieve academic success (Kasa-Hendrickson, 2005).

Educational accountability. Along with the unjust dispersion of teachers and the "failure" of teacher education programs, educational accountability has turned out to be central to finding ways to provide a quality education to all students (Kleinhammer-Tramill, Tramill, & Brace, 2010). This issue is seemingly more noticeable when general education teachers try to instruct students with special needs. Research has shown these teachers are unprepared, ineffective, and temporary (Ingersoll, 2001). According to Ware and Kitsantas (2007), the methodology behind preparing teachers for their job as educators and preparing them for longevity in inner-city schools has become a challenging question found in this particular study.

Another concern throughout the existence of public education has been academic justice. One major attribute to the academic dilemma found in high-needs academic schools is noted as being the low quality teaching and is found to be lacking and unmerited (Koppich & Meerseth, 2000). While furthering his explanation of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) and its ability to hopefully provide improvement to the quality of teacher preparation, with a concentrated focus on preparing teachers for 'high-need' areas, his knowledge of this particular portion of legislative documentation and the poor quality of the current pre-service teacher training, pointed out that researchers have failed in their discovery attempts to determine what makes teacher education effective or ineffective (Overton, 2009).

Training of Special Needs Teachers

While research was focused on the training of special education teachers, other research combined the needs of special education training and classroom practices (Algozzine, Morsink, & Algozzine, 1998; Nougaret et al., 2005). These researchers suggested that traditional graduates of special education had superior classroom practice compared to alternative certification programs of their counterparts (university-district partnership and a district add-on program). In all, traditionally certified special education teachers are highly recognized for better performance than emergency certified special education teachers (Feng & Sass 2009).

To clarify, the roles of special education teachers are complex and training is required in diverse areas. However, research indicates that special education teachers at elementary school levels should know how to teach reading to their students, have knowledge of mathematics, and social skills development (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Researchers find it difficult to assess the effectiveness of teachers when students with disabilities are associated with one or more teachers and all have responsibility for instruction (Feng & Sass, 2009). Feng and Sass's (2009) research substantiated that special education teachers held high achievement standards for their students. "Teachers with substantial amounts of special education course work (measured by certification status) are more effective in promoting achievement gains for students with disabilities in regular education courses than teachers without such preparation" (Feng & Sass, 2009, p. 19).

Moreover, the findings revealed that experience had greater impact in special education classroom settings than in classrooms with general education. Feng and Sass

(2009) concluded that "reducing certification requirements for special education teachers via alternative certification programs may be counterproductive" (p. 19). The attainment of an advanced degree is necessary in the positive gains in student learning. However, professional development of special education teachers may lack the desired outcomes that would be essential in meeting the needs and academic development of students with disabilities (Feng & Sass, 2009). While achieving the academic development of students with special needs, researchers and practitioners should find out what teaching model will work best for those students.

Concerns for Special Education Teachers

Much of the United States is set apart by its diverse society. By definition, diversity describes the racial and ethnic differences of that particular society (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007). On a larger scale, diversity is quite simply a lifestyle that pertains to the distinctions of race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disabilities, age, and an individual's values and beliefs about the self-evident moral goods in the society (Lee, Wehmeyar, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008).

According to Plash and Piotrowski (2006), an estimated 30 percent of educators are expected to leave the profession within a three-year period. Incredibly enough, first year special education teachers are two and a half times more likely to leave their jobs than their counterparts in general education (Wolteer & Daugherty, 2007). Unfortunately, these ominous statistics effect the preparation and retention of special education intern teachers directly, who are at risk due to the realisms of fiscal setbacks, limited resources, inadequate preparation agendas, and increased workloads. As stated previously, beginning special education teachers are more at risk for leaving (Brownell et al., 2009).

In addition, the rate of special education teachers transferring to general education is 10 times greater than that of general education teachers transferring to special education (Muller & Markowitz, 2003). Special educators are required to provide extra paperwork, additional record keeping, specialized behavior management skills, a meticulous knowledge of specified content areas, and special education teachers are less likely to have colleagues at their schools available for mentoring and mutual relationships (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002).

Nonetheless, teachers need to possess the ability to be culturally sensitive and responsive to assist children from different backgrounds and with a variety of needs, while developing beliefs and capacities to cope with school diversity. Oftentimes, this has been proven to be a tough goal due to the stereotypical views of school diversity that a lot of times have a negative result with unpleasant teacher-student relationships and poor student achievement (Gibson, 2004). Frequently, United States classroom teachers have both unfavorable attitudes and little confidence in teaching students with special needs in regular settings (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010).

Special education teachers at risk. Research shows that children with special needs are at a higher risk for academic failure, depression, anxiety, and experience lower peer acceptance compared to their peers without special needs (Bussing, Zima, & Perwien, 2000; Cook & Semmel, 1999; Maag & Reid, 2006; Sideridis, Mouzaki, Simos, & Protopapas, 2006). Incredibly enough, individuals that are professionally committed to assisting high-risk students are considered a high-risk group.

In addition, many special education teachers are continually faced with the grueling task of teaching demanding student populations in the framework of taxing

working environments. According to Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997), this was found to be especially true for those educators teaching students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Further studies illustrate that special education teachers are met with the challenges of teaching students with numerous disabilities, classrooms with students presenting a range of disabilities, and significantly high caseloads. Furthermore, paperwork and regulatory issues are also tied to the high turnover rates of special educators, even after controlling for other variables (Spense, 2002).

Burnout. Another factor is high turnover rates or attrition rates, which are connected to burnout. Burnout has been described as, "A progressive loss of energy and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work" (Edlewich & Brodsky, 1980, p. 14), "a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause" (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980, p. 13), and "the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when they are troubled or having problems" (Maslach, 1982, p. 3). Considering the previous definitions mentioned, to surmise that burnout is more than a general stress reaction would be safe. To a certain extent, burnout happens when situational stressors cause conflict; thus, not allowing the teaching experience to be meaningful (Pines, 1993). Special education teachers that are committed to the personal and academic growth of their students, often feel burnout when job demands are burdening and their daily work challenges interfere with their ability to achieve their professional goals.

Along with burnout, there is emotional exhaustion. Teachers experiencing emotional exhaustion feel a lack of energy, lessened motivation, and no interest in going to work (Maslach, 1982). There are different components of burnout. One of which is

depersonalization: the psychological distancing from others in an attempt to protect oneself (Maslasch & Leiter, 1997). It is how an individual relates to others: through cynicism, lack of idealism, or negative attitude towards others. The intention of depersonalization is to avoid those needs and demands are experienced as overwhelming (Maslach, 1982).

An unfortunate effect is depersonalization in the classroom, which interferes with collaborative working relationships between teacher and student, teacher and parent, teacher and colleagues, as well as, teacher and administration. As a result of depersonalization, there is a change in self-appraisal, causing feelings of inefficacy and negative self-evaluations are created (Cordes & Doughetry, 1993). Often times teachers feel less competent, less productive, and experience guilt. Ironically enough, they may even feel loss of control professionally and doubt their professional teaching abilities.

Definitions of attrition and retention. Billingsley (1993) supplied a four-category schematic representation of special education teacher retention, transfer, and attrition. In category one, retention pertained to teachers who stayed in the same teaching assignment and the same school as the previous year. Category two focuses on those teachers who transferred to another special education teaching position, but stayed in special education either in the same district or another. The third category is the group of special educators who transferred to general education, hence, somewhat causing a loss to the special education teaching forces (Billingsley, 1993). Finally, the fourth category: exit attrition. Exit attrition is a category that included educators that left teaching all together: retired, stayed at home, or took non-teaching positions (e.g., counseling or administrative positions).

As Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997) stated, "The most troublesome component of turnover is exit attrition, because it represents a reduction in the teaching force, requiring a compensating inflow of replacement teachers" (p. 377). In order for teachers to be retained and the rate of attrition to decrease, school districts must meet the needs of teachers and students by providing the needed resources for academic success.

Retention and attrition of special education teachers. Not only is teaching extremely challenging in the special education field, but cultivating a qualified workforce and creating work environments that sustain special educators' involvement and commitment is equally as challenging. It is for this reason that for more than two decades, problems relating to special education teacher shortages and attrition have been concerning to policy makers and administrators who recruit and hire special education teachers (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000; Morsink, 1982; Smith-Davis & Billingsley, 1993; Smith-Davis, Burke, & Noel, 1984), thus, influencing special educators with these varied and complex factors. The special educator shortages have caused serious consequences for students with disabilities.

The consequences caused by special educator shortages include inadequate educational experiences for students, a reduction in student achievement levels, and an insufficient competence level of graduates in the workplace (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Even though the reasons for the shortage problems are multifaceted, teacher attrition can be presumed the cause. The most current studies imply that although math, science, and special education have the highest turnover rates, special educators are more likely to quit than any other teacher group (Ingersoll, 2001).

In the same manner, there are different types of attrition. One would be, for example, transferring to other teaching and educational positions. The field of special education loses many teachers to general education with a sizeable proportion of special educators transferring to general education than the reverse (Boe, Cook, Bobitt, & Webber, 1998). Reports have shown that of the teachers who plan to leave special education, 12% want to transfer to general education (Schnorr, 1995). While general education draws in many special education teachers for their reasons, other teachers leave to get away from what they view to be the poor work conditions in special education (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). To successfully reduce attrition, efforts should be based on an understanding of dynamics that play a part in special educators' decisions to leave the field.

Inclusive Pedagogical Practices and Knowledge in Special Education

Pedagogy is an attempt to encourage how and what information is identified and produced among a certain social group. By practicing pedagogy you are enabling creative experiences that will arrange or disarrange the natural and social order of things (Maag & Reid, 2006). Pedagogy is a concept that draws attention to the processes through which knowledge is produced (Freire, 1996).

Regrettably, the majority of general and special education teachers are simply incapable of providing the needed skills and knowledge to teach students with special need (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2009). Klassen (2010b) and Ingersoll (2001) believe that increasingly large numbers of students with special needs are being "pushed" into general education classrooms. This is affecting the classroom teacher efficacy for both special and general education teachers, because they are unprepared for this

seemingly sudden and unexpected shift. Seasoned and newly trained teachers need to know what they are teaching, the diverse students that they will be teaching, and the principles to teach them (Kea & Utley, 1998). Qualified teachers are needed to use quality, research-based pedagogy that is responsive to the learning, emotional, and social needs of all students with or without disabilities in inner city and rural school districts throughout the nation.

Even more, cross-cultural experiences need to be offered in many diverse ways. These teachers must adapt to the information and establish a clear knowledge of skills, teaching styles, and pedagogical practices. In order to make this information readily available and adaptable for teachers, educators must make sure that the curriculum, methodology, and instructional materials respect the values and cultural norms of the students. Therefore, in order to create a successful school environment, teachers must be prepared to connect, commit, and practice with lower level learners and their families. By implementing new ways to bridging the gap between students who are on level and those who are below level, teachers should find a way to connect academically to the students with special needs by changing the instruction to cater to their needs.

Differentiated instruction. Traditional curricula that are implemented in schools do not reflect struggling or low level learners, which may discourage academic success for students with special needs (Hudley, 1995; Irvine, 2003). Creating and implementing a curriculum that caters to the culture, community, and the interest of these particular learners will enhance student achievement because the students will have a better understanding of what is being taught in the classroom (Campbell & Uusimaki, 2006). Teachers are presented with children who have varied learning styles and therefore,

educators should receive training pertinent to students' cultural background and incorporate culturally insightful teaching styles to enhance the progress of learning.

According to Gay (2000), students who are low level learners have a difficult time academically compared to their "on level" counterparts. Some school districts do not provide the necessary services needed to educate special needs students (Rutledge, 2003). The curriculum needs to be revamped in order to meet the needs of all children despite their learning disability. Ladson-Billings (2005) discusses how educational systems throughout the country continue to implement a curriculum that does not differentiate the instruction, which directly affects the self-efficacy and achievement of students with special needs.

In addition, educators fail to recognize key elements such as learning styles, pedagogical practices, and culturally responsive teaching in terms of empathy and educational experiences as regards students who struggle in the classroom (Cheung, 2006). At the same time, due to the lack of recognition from educators, these children can become open to low self-esteem and academic deficiency (Solberg et al., 2012). Therefore, educators must learn new ways to channel the behaviors of struggling students and implement a new method of teaching for the growth of students and themselves.

Inclusion teachers and classrooms. Devotion to federal mandates in the United States requesting the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment has caused a decade-long drive toward the development of educational programs permitting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom to the fullest possible degree. The least restrictive refers to the education of students with disabilities in the general education department.

Specifically, inclusion refers to educational service provisions in the least limiting environment, depending on the student's strengths and needs, and including a considerable continuum of possible supports (Murwaski & Swanson, 2001). Bringing services and support to the student in the general education classroom, as opposed to removing those same students from different learning encounters with their same aged peers, is greatly viewed as the signature of inclusion.

As a result, it appears that in recent years the desire to measure and improve the quality of inclusive special education routines has been held back by the need to provide a universal understanding of what is meant by inclusion, and to communicate the concept while offering a starting point from which to measure the success of inclusion efforts. Although inclusion focuses on such a broad perspective, the goal is to provide educators with greater awareness of the array of inclusion programs in the school; thus, providing a tool for measuring program success (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Models of inclusion. Co-teaching can be defined as two or more professionals delivering extensive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single or physical space (Cook & Semmel, 1999). According to Cook and Friend's (1995) research, each educator, both special and general, are involved in the student's academic instruction, within the same classroom. These educators may participate in parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative instruction, or team teaching.

In the second place, the educators may choose to rotate their teaching responsibilities throughout the day with the other teacher serving as more of a support member (Cook & Friend, 1995). With these different types of instruction, students with and without special needs benefit from a greater variety of instruction, along with

employment and intervention techniques created to aid in the teaching of both general and special education students (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Push-In/Pull-Out model of instruction. In a push-in intervention program, certified staff that are going to work with the student in an individualized state or a small group escorts the child into the classroom (Montgomery, 2001). A child who is able to concentrate when various things are occurring in the classroom is a likely candidate suited for this intervention program, however, a child who is not behind in skill level is also another candidate for this type of intervention program where a teachers' assistant, tutor, or specialist can assist (Montgomery, 2001). In a pull-out intervention program, help in reading is provided outside of the child's classroom. This type of intervention allows the child to feel free from embarrassment or be compared to other classmates. While this program creates an environment successful for the needs of children who are easily distracted and behind in skill levels, it creates a private setting that enables concentration and the ability to work without distractions.

Similarly, push-in and the pull-out intervention programs aide in helping with reading and the delivery of services needed for the child (Reed & Monda-Ayama, 1995). Each method has the ability to be effective, however, the effectiveness of these programs is based on the needs of the child. Research of both programs suggests that both programs can be effective, but the teaching quality, parental cooperation and intervention in following through with homework, and compassion to the child's progress is essential for the success of the child's performance (Reed & Monda-Ayama, 1995). Moreover, these programs do not embarrass the child or create any type of stigmatism. School districts are moving forward with an all-school intervention model called Response to Intervention

(RIT), which may turn out to be the best model to meet the needs of children and their ability to succeed.

Response to intervention. Response to intervention is a diagnosis of educational disabilities that allows the school to intervene early to meet the needs of struggling learners (Wright, 2005). Response to Intervention (RTI) has a positive end result for gifted education framework for a policy development, because it integrates classroom practices that modify superior instruction based upon students' academic or behavioral needs (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, (2006) The emphasis that RTI has placed on the phases of assessment and prevention, early intervention, and determination of disability, has made this practice a vital process because of its ability to assist schools in offering customized learning for all students. Unfortunately, when compared to special education teachers, general education teachers working with special needs students are less likely to possess the experience and preparation for successful implementation.

Therefore, Response to Intervention will ensure that teachers are provided the instructions needed to support the academic success for each student with special needs and encourages learning for both student and teacher. In order for RTI to be implemented, special education advocates must first use their influence to persuade lawmakers that this is a very important issue for special needs students, because it will give them a chance to achieve academic success (Fowler, 2009). The most challenging task is to mobilize the bias and to persuade the district and the public that Response to Intervention will aid and assist students at risk. Mobilization of bias is an implicit use of

authority that changes the conversation when one cannot discuss certain things (Fowler, 2009).

Mobilization of bias does not always emerge in the form of over-generalization, but in small subtle hints that will convey the same message. There have been several myths about their inability to achieve academic success, however if given equal opportunity, special needs students can excel and become productive citizens in our society (Fowler, 2009). Therefore, special needs students must be provided the opportunity for academic success and encouraged to meet the demands of the 21st Century to enable growth and the ability to meet the daily challenges of society.

Teacher Efficacy

Within the teaching profession, quite a few studies have been performed examining efficacy and all its mechanisms: self-efficacy, teacher-efficacy, or teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Fives et al., 2005; MacCarty, 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990) with the interchangeable use of teacher-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy has been extensively researched since it was first introduced in 1977.

Based on Bandura's concept of cognitive theory of social learning, the premise is that a teacher can produce desired outcomes in his or her students (Bandura 1977, 1982, 1994, 1997). Preservice preparation experiences are a fundamental part in the development of teacher efficacy and aid in boosting teacher confidence in positive teacher learning (Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005). One of the first studies of efficacy performed by the Rand organization in 1998, discovered that "Teachers' sense of efficacy had a strong positive effect not only on student performance, but on the percentage of

project goals achieved, on the amount of teacher change, and on the continued use of project methods and materials after the project ended" (Tschannen-Moran, et. al. 1998, p. 204).

Teacher efficacy has also been found to be a stable and crucial indicator of teacher motivation and practice (Pohan, 1996); teacher receptivity to innovative strategies (Guskey, 1998); student motivation (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990); and student success (Bandura, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Studies also show that teacher self-efficacy is similar to general self-efficacy; however, with examined beliefs, the teacher has the personal ability to produce the desired results in relation to the student and the classroom environment, even with the challenging students (Fives et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). There are three areas where teachers may demonstrate levels of efficacy: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Strands of teacher efficacy. Teacher-efficacy is separated into two main parts: general teaching-efficacy and personal teaching-efficacy (Romi & Leyser, 2006). General teaching-efficacy (GTE) is the teacher's ability to produce desired effects within the classroom setting with the student. Personal teaching-efficacy (PTE) is the belief of the teacher that he or she has the ability to affect the student's learning. Efficacious teachers are more likely to try exciting new ideas, do what needs to be done to meet the needs of the student, have a more positive classroom environment, and are less likely to seek special education services for students (Henson, 2001; Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005; Romi & Leyser, 2006).

Studies have also shown that teacher efficacy is associated with student achievement and teachers who have a stronger sense of resiliency (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Woolfolk-Hoy & Spero, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Teacher-efficacy beliefs are somewhat rigid and often difficult to modify (Hoy, 2000). Research has shown that during teacher preparation programs, efficacy increases and reaches an all-time high after student teaching.

Self-Efficacy

When there is mention of the term self-efficacy, Albert Bandura is most referenced (Bong & Clark, 1990; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Fasko & Fasko, 1998; Fritz et al., 2001; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Romi & Leyser, 2006). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the notion that one has the ability to affect outcomes that pertain to him or her. Self-efficacy is one of the many concepts within social cognitive theory that observes the principles that individuals have the ability to make decisions that can create wanted outcomes. This principle has proven to influence individuals' behaviors, self-perceptions, and thoughts. For example, those individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs take difficulties as challenges, a chance for opportunity, rather than barriers.

This also holds true for those teachers who have low self-efficacy. Which is the belief that these individuals have a hard time recuperating from failure and view challenges totally opposite of an individual with high self-efficacy: not as a challenge, but a hindrance. Furthermore, certain additional factors play into individual self-efficacy. Those factors would be performance accomplishments or enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal or physiological reactions (Bandura, 1977, Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Realms of self-efficacy. Within the realms of efficacy, they are different types, which are: personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2000). Personal-efficacy is how individual actions affect their own lives. Proxy-efficacy is when individuals intentionally allow others to make decisions that are anticipated to positively affect a group. Collective-efficacy pertains to group mentality: each member ultimately has something to contribute; thus, achieving the ultimate common goal. There are three mechanisms vital in helping with the ideologies of teacher efficacy.

First, individuals own the important information to make rational decisions; secondly, individuals own the ability to make the required actions; and finally, individuals are able to obtain extra information and abilities in a plethora of situations or those individuals are able to adapt (Roberts, 2000). For that reason, those individuals that view themselves as efficacious are usually able to set complicated goals and achieve them. Those individuals are also able to recover from hindrances or failures that occur in the midst of their goals.

Second, performance accomplishments or enactive mastery experiences are those experiences that direct an individual to believe that certain assignments are within the reach of accomplishment. Vicarious experiences occur when individuals look at other individuals who appear to be similar to him or her and realize that they were only able to accomplish similar duties. The end result is that individual believing he or she also has the ability to accomplish the duty. Verbal persuasion is the way efficacy judgments are made.

For example, if an individual views others who are trying to persuade him or her as knowledgeable, then he or she is more expected to believe him or herself as able to

accomplish those duties. Lastly, emotional arousal or physiological reactions affect individuals' acuity of belief in achievement. Thus, creating negative physiological responses can impact self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Self-efficacy has been noted as a core belief. Therefore, if individuals feel they cannot manipulate the events that affect them, then they have no incentive to do anything (Bandura, 2000). Therefore, by enabling innovative approaches to learning, individuals will have more control over the events and the information gathered.

Conclusion

This literature review presented key themes related to the education of exceptional children required under the IDEA, current trends in special education and pedagogy, and teacher self-efficacy. Henson (2010) suggests a teacher's level of efficacy has a significant impact on a teacher's effectiveness. By merging the two constructs of improving the pedagogical practices of teachers and implementing strategies that encourage the development of positive self-efficacy in teachers, this study will contribute to the development of practices that better support students with special needs in the general education classroom, and add to the scholarly research and literature in the fields of students with special needs and teacher efficacy.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Academic success and student achievement are at the foundation of public education. When students are not performing to the best of their ability, teachers and administrators are responsible for identifying the problem and implementing interventions that provide solutions. More often than not, the impediments to academic success can be adequately addressed when teachers implement research based pedagogical practices that will aid in meeting students' academic goals, especially students with special needs (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008).

Students with special needs require educators who are trained in providing instruction that meets the condition of their disability and aides in the students' successful learning development. Since their learning disability plays an important part in the process of their social and emotional growth, these marginalized students are faced with a learning curve that only teachers can impact, by elevating student achievement. Therefore, educators should receive training pertinent to instructing students who have special needs.

In addition, teachers should be prepared to meet the needs of special needs students through differentiated instruction and support mechanisms. Educators should participate in professional development sessions, professional learning communities, and focus groups to help improve instruction and learning for students with special needs. This approach will help students to reach their academic and IEP goals as well as build up the motivation of students with special needs (Klassen, 2010a). The foundation for

this study began with a group of teachers seeking to better serve special needs students within their school.

Specifically, the Community Advancement Preparatory School (CAPS) had an influx of special needs students over the last 10 years. This was possibly a result of the school choice model that accepted students not only from their hometown, but also nearby towns. One of the major goals for teachers as well as administrators at Community Advancement Preparatory School was to more effectively instruct their growing population of special needs students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to enhance teacher self-efficacy and pedagogical practices to better serve students with special needs.

Research Questions

Consequently, this action research study addressed the following research questions:

1. What were general and special education teachers' perceptions of their teacher efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs?

2. What pedagogical approaches improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities?

3. How did educators use differentiated instruction to increase academic success for students with special needs?

4. How did my leadership foster the development of teacher efficacy to impact students with special needs?

Research Design

In order to examine the impact of teacher efficacy and pedagogical practices for teachers of special need students, an action research design was used. "Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry, usually cyclical, conducted by those inside a community rather than by outside experts. Its goal is to identify action that will generate improvement the researcher believes important" (Hinchey, 2008, p. 17). Action research is also described as "a tool for practitioners or administrators who want their practice to be more effective and is used to reflect on how effective the person is and how he or she might improve" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 221). This model is based on the following steps: planning, acting, observing, and evaluating the outcome of the action and conceptualizing the development or desirable change within the research. Furthermore, the goal of action research is to enhance the lives of students and professionals and incorporate a reflective stance in practice by making informed decisions about what to change and what not to change (Hinchey, 2008).

Action research also helps link prior knowledge to new information, as well as help students and professionals learn from their positive and negative experiences (Mills, 2000). The impact of action research allows teachers to improve their practice. Action research can also be conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn.

The ultimate goal of this study was to enrich the pedagogical practices of special and general education teachers to better service the special needs population at the Community Advancement Preparatory School. Therefore, the action research design was

appropriate for this study because it provided teachers with an opportunity to improve their practice through the planning of cycles, implementing courses of action, observing and evaluating the findings, and reflecting on the process and outcome to determine the next phase of action (Glesne, 2006). Additionally, action research was appropriate for this study because it gave real-time data, feedback, and recommendations about an issue that was of utmost concern at CAPS, which was developing and implementing an effective instructional model that both general and special education teachers could use to service students with special needs.

Study Setting

Community Advancement Preparatory School (CAPS) is located in southern New Jersey, and was known as one of the top 20 places to live in the state of New Jersey. The population of this town was approximately 2,000 people and the nearest major city is 32 miles away. Currently, Community Advancement Preparatory School has approximately 412 students in the district from Pre-K to 8th grade. Out of the 412 students, 57 were classified with special needs. Most of the classifications were specific learning disabilities, communication impairments, multiple disabled, and a few health impairments.

The staff breakdown consisted of 35 certificated staff members, 4 part time staff (all female), and 4 instructional aides (1 male & 3 female). The student-to-teacher ratio is 16 to 1 and student demographics were as follows: 1% unknown, 1% Asian, 3% African American, 8% Hispanic and 87% White. Community Advancement Preparatory School was also a choice district, which provides the opportunity for non-resident students to

attend CAPS at no cost to their parents or guardians. This program also includes transportation options for School Choice students (Folsomschoolfusion.com).

The two-year vision for CAPS is to achieve and maintain the following:

- A clear and shared focus on student learning that prepares students for a future characterized by change and an increasing dependence on technology.

- High academic, social standards and expectations for our learning community.

- Effective school leadership, which fosters mutual respect and trust.

- High levels of collaboration and communication within our learning community.

- A learning environment where people feel safe, supported and respect is evident; a facility that is conducive to learning

- High levels of community/family involvement, working to improve students' academic and personal growth

- A learning environment that honors different learning and teaching styles, confronts bias, stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes, and displays respect for diversity

- Aligned curriculum, instruction and assessment with District and New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards

- Continual monitoring of teaching and learning methods, with adjustments made to meet the individual needs of our learning community

- Focused professional development that is reflective of Community Advancement Preparatory School

The mission of Community Advancement Preparatory School is to serve the unique academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of all students, in a safe, supportive, and caring environment. CAPS staff members are committed to working with parents and community partners to provide the necessary supports to ensure that all children achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, thus developing the needed skills to function responsibly in a global society. They strive to promote their students' exploration, creativity, and self-determination to help develop a lifelong love of learning.

The vision and mission statements are part of the school improvement plan and drive its development. It is developed yearly by a team of administrators, teachers, coaches, the guidance counselor, paraprofessionals, parents, and community members. The members are important stakeholders in the decision-making process for the school and collaborate in addressing the instructional and operational needs of the students. The administrator facilitates the development of the plan to ensure that the vision is shared and supported by all the stakeholders. The administrator becomes proactive, empowering others to effectively plan and implement the changes teachers and administrators need to make. This model provided a framework for school planning and is adjusted as needed yearly to meet the goals and objectives to make sure that students learn and are in an environment that is conducive to learning (Aronson, 2004; Ikegulu, 2009).

In summary, based on the information above, the study site is a rural environment that serves the community and surrounding towns. There has been a sharp increase in the number of special needs students in this district due to the school choice model and there is also an inclusion model at Community Advancement Preparatory School, which means

that both general and special education teachers should have the ability, resources, and a researched based pedagogical approach to instruct special needs students.

Participant Sampling

In purposive sampling, people or other units are chosen as the name implies, for a particular purpose (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is dependent on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units such as people, cases, events, that are to be studied. Generally, the sample being explored is quite small. "The logic and power of purposive sampling leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Additionally, purposive sampling requires the selection of the site and the participants to purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2003). Thus, the participant sampling will be consistent with data needed for this action research study, which includes teachers who instruct students with special needs (Craig, 2009).

The purposive sampling strategy was used in this study since the site was a one school district in Southern New Jersey that experienced an increase in the number of special needs students over the last 10 years. This provided information rich cases that informed the research questions. The sample participants were a mixture of both general and special education teachers in the school district that were responsible in some way for instructing special needs students. For this study, a total of 10 inclusion teachers (5 special education and 5 general education teachers) who were current employees at CAPS were selected. Demographic information was obtained from both special and general education teachers for this study in December 2014. All participants were

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teachers who interacted with the students and became involved with the overall achievement of these students within the special education program.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my role and intentions were voiced to the participants. According to Glesne (2006), supported qualitative research and its researchers as active players are essential to the research. It was imperative that trust be established. Building trust with each participant involved informal conversations, which built rapport. I maintained a low profile not to influence the behaviors of the participants. In addition, I refrained from demonstrating the traits of an expert authority and maintained my active listening skills to ensure an attentive response (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Also as an educator and social change agent, it was important to remember five components of leadership, which are: Moral Purpose, Understanding Change, Building Relationships, Creating & Sharing Knowledge, and Making Coherence (Fullan, 2004). Using Fullan's components of leadership helped foster the learning orientation that allowed special education teachers to become comfortable in implementing effective instruction for students with special needs. This model best fits this study because it is not a rational model. It is a learning orientation model that challenged the special education and general education teachers to maximize the way they learn and prove most effective in a classroom setting. Unfortunately, leadership is still often the "most studied and least understood topic in social science" (Bennis, 1989) and leadership research has aptly been described as the search for the philosopher's stone" (Smith & Peterson, 1988). Being flexible, prepared, and considerate enabled me to be comfortable in my engagement and interaction with all participants and stakeholders. The setting was

beneficial for the normal daily interactions and behaviors performed by all participants involved. During observations, data collection consisted of field notes and the utilization of technological devices. Hinchey (2008) states, "To determine reliable answers to research questions, researchers must make careful decisions about what kind, and how much, data to collect" (p. 74).

I used a deductive approach to gaining knowledge and collection data. Since this study deals with human behaviors as variables and qualitative and quantitative research, the researcher utilized a logic model of analysis, focusing on inputs (the process of professional development) and outputs (the level of teacher efficacy).

Data Collection Strategies

The purpose of this study was to use an action research design as a way of gathering, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative data within a single research study (Creswell, 2003). The action research design allowed for both qualitative and quantitative data to be used to address the issue of teacher self-efficacy towards working with special needs students. In this study, qualitative and quantitative data was collected. These techniques were used to acquire information on teacher efficacy from the viewpoint of teachers themselves so that their pedagogical practices could be enhanced to better serve the special need student population.

When both quantitative and qualitative techniques are utilized, it produces a more comprehensive research study (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Quantitative research depends on numerical data obtained by the researcher (Charles & Mertler, 2002). Qualitative research is "an inquiry process of understanding" where the researcher develops a "complex, holistic, picture, analyzes

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words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting"
(Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

Data Collection Instruments

Specifically, for this study, the data collection instruments consisted of a Pre-
questionnaire, Pre Bandura Assessment, Focus Group, One to One Interviews, Exit
Interview questions, and Post Bandura Assessment. These components allowed the
researcher to collect important information that added to the body of knowledge as it
relates to teacher efficacy and students with special needs. The data collection
instruments allowed the researcher to collect information about each teacher's education,
teaching experience, and views and beliefs about teaching students with special needs.
Furthermore, the pre and post Bandura assessment allowed the researcher to compare
how teachers' confidence levels changed after the professional development.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative research can be defined as a systematic investigation of quantitative
properties and their outstanding relationships. The technique entails the use of numbers
that are measurable. Data simplify quantifiable pieces of information to be statistically
analyzed to produce a synopsis. Glesne (2006) indicates that quantitative approaches
question the phenomena in its theory. Quantitative data include pieces of information that
can be counted and oftentimes are gathered by surveys from respondents for a specific
topic. The quantitative data collected in this study were analyzed using statistical
methods. Collecting quantitative data allowed the researcher to collect data that were
consistent, precise, and reliable.

Teacher efficacy scale. In order to conduct meaningful quantitative research, a teacher efficacy scale developed by Dr. Albert Bandura was used. The Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Bandura (1997) to examine teachers' perception and beliefs of their ability to influence their student outcome in their classrooms. The Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale is a 30-item Likert-type scale that is divided into seven categories, including: (1) decision making, (2) school resources, (3) instructional self-efficacy, (4) disciplinary self-efficacy, (5) parental involvement, (6) community involvement, and (7) positive school culture.

The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale allowed the participants to rate themselves on their level of efficacy in working with special needs students. In this study, a Pre and Post Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy scale was distributed to the participants to monitor progress from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. The teacher efficacy scale was used to collect information on the phenomena that could not be observed. This was an effective process to use in collecting the data. These surveys provided responses that were readily tabulated and analyzed. For this study, the information surveyed was anonymously rendered. Establishing anonymity allowed the collection of sensitive data from the respondents to be more open and truthful.

Qualitative Data

"Qualitative researchers in contrast, seek to understand and interpret how various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Qualitative methods are helpful in providing explanations to complex phenomena, establishing evolving theories, and providing hypotheses in the explanation of the phenomena. Qualitative research uses narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection

to understand the way things are and what it means from the perspectives of the research participants (Creswell, 2003).

Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or event. It seeks to provide a precise depiction of the structure, order, and broad patterns found among a group of participants. This is accomplished through gaining insight of first-hand experiences, truthful reporting, and quotations of actual conversations. Qualitative data use observation as the data collection method. This process is known as observational research, due to the fact that the researcher observes and analyzes the participants to gather quantitative data (Cresswell, 2003).

Observations. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) state, "Direct observation involves gathering 'live' data about individuals as the behavior occurs" (p. 181). In addition, Gall et al. (2005) also state observations are more objective and purposeful as they relate to examining the effects of teacher efficacy in a K-8 choice school district; the conducting of direct observation was extremely critical. Punch (2009) states, "In naturalistic observation, observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behavior of those whom they are observing" (p. 154). In addition, time was given and spent with participants in an unobtrusive manner. The qualitative research focused on the behavior of each participant. In my study, I observed participants in several settings. I observed participants in two exercises: the Selective Awareness test and the note taking exercise. I also observed participant behavior in the focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews. The observations provided me with a way to check for nonverbal expressions of feelings. Participant observation helped me in answering my descriptive research questions.

Field notes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) depict field notes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks, in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (p. 118). In order to ascertain the subject and record the data without disturbing the environment, field notes were used (Webb, 1991). Field notes are written descriptions of the collected data during the observation and interviewing process (Van Maanen, 1988). While styles of field notes exist, the two parts important in documenting are the descriptive and reflective (Burgess, 1991). Descriptive style allows the observer to capture the setting in words, actions, and conversations. Reflective style enables the observer to record thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns based on the observation and interview. During the research, field notes were central to classroom observations. Additionally, details of conversations, interactions, activities, behaviors, and other events were recorded in a spiral bound notebook. Glesne (2006) advises, "Check your field notes for vague adjectives such as many or some and replace them with more descriptive words" (p. 57).

Pre-Questionnaire. The pre-study questionnaire was officially administered to each potential study participant during a scheduled time at Community Advancement Preparatory School where I was able to meet with each teacher individually and face-to-face. The purpose of this questionnaire was to assist me, as the researcher, in making an official determination of the participants who fit the study criteria, which was being either a certified special education or general education teacher as well as being a teacher charged with instructing students with special needs. The secondary purpose of this survey was to obtain accurate contact information for potential study participants, as well as other information about individuals who assisted me with performing interviews in

latter stages of the research project (Dilley, 2000). Before participating in the pre-questionnaire survey, a consent form was provided that thoroughly explained the process to each potential participant. Only those who signed the consent form participated in the survey.

The first five questions that I presented to the participants were demographic questions. I chose to ask these questions because it allowed me to learn more about their background and primary responsibilities and experience in the field of education. The demographic questions were also necessary to determine whether the individuals in this study met the target population.

Focus group interviews. Krueger and Casey (2009) state that a focus group as a "carefully planned series of discussions to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 2). While focus groups are used for market research, product or program development, policy making and testing, goal setting, needs assessment and decision-making, focus groups can also be used as a research tool to gather information to determine the participant perceptions about a service, product, or issue (Krueger & Casey).

Some social science researchers find that focus groups are important to participatory studies because they provide opportunity to those who do not have a platform to speak on the specific subject discussed. These groups take on discussions with participants that encourage other participants to voice their opinions and establish reliable responses on their experience (Linville, Lambert-Shute, Fruhauf, & Piercy, 2003). Researchers frequently use focus groups to obtain information in a timely manner and with the viewpoint they were seeking (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Linville et al., 2003).

In addition, Krueger and Casey find researchers can get "believable results at a reasonable cost" (2009, p. 20).

Focus groups are able to be used to evaluate organizations and their programs. (Grudens-Schuck, Allen, & Larson, 2004: Krueger & Casey, 2009). Participants in a focus group are able to encourage conversation and decrease conflict when meetings are held on the turf of the participants (Holz-Clause & Jost, 1995; House & Howe, 1999). Focus group discussions are able to create improvement of an organization and its programs (House & Howe).

Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest, "The magic of a focus group is that people feel comfortable" (p. 2). Madriz (2000) states, "the interaction occurring within the group accentuates empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation" (p. 842) building an environment empowering communities and the environment. Social science researchers use focus groups to observe the behavior of participants and their interaction with others or to study the cultural background of the group (Soklaridis, 2009). In my study I used a focus group to gain a better understanding of teachers' perception of teacher efficacy as it related to instructing students with special needs.

One-to-One interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state, "Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives" (p. 104). The importance of listening carefully during interviewing as indicated by Bogdan and Biklen potentially leads to understanding the subjects' point of view. Researchers should question for clarity or elaborate further without challenging participants. This is particularly important when the researcher has assigned participants.

Additionally, interviewing provides a prominent data collection tool in qualitative research. It presents the opportunity to access people's perceptions, implications, definition of situations, and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways we can understand others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 144). Participants were interviewed one at a time. One-to-one interviews provided accurate perceptions of the participant without group dynamic snags.

Essentially, these interviews were semi-structured, and were sought to "…explore the meaning of concepts, categories, and events" (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 293) in the interviewees' words, these types of interviews were "…designed to ask participants to reconstruct their experiences and to explore their meaning" (Seidman, 1998, p. 76). During individual interviews, teachers had the opportunity to speak honestly and openly about their experience and personal views of teacher efficacy and pedagogical practices for students with special needs. Each participant was asked the same question, in order, and as described in the Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix A). Merriam (1998) suggests, "A researcher may feel more confident with a format where most if not all the questions were written out ahead of time" (p. 82). Performing interview schedules enabled a greater experience and assurance in successfully creating open-ended questioning for participants. With the permission of each teacher participant, interviews were digitally recorded and immediately transcribed.

Merriam (1998) suggests that researchers design and format more open-ended questions. This choice provided more opportunities for the individual conducting the research to question the respondent and encourage open candid response. Researchers must provide questions that are straightforward and extract the information desired.

When "Yes and No" responses were given, participants were advised to provide supportive explanations to their responses. In addition, this approach aided in the reluctant respondents' avoidance of a complete response, when given more encouragement and elaborate suggestions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state, "People being interviewed have a tendency to offer quick run-through of events. Informants can be taught to respond to meet the interviewer's interest in the particulars, the details. They need encouragement to elaborate" (p. 107).

    Exit interviews. The main purpose of the exit interview was to give the researcher more insight about the academic experiences of the participants. This was designed to help the researcher better understand the transition experiences of the teacher, and to become more familiarized with the needs of the students during the transition process (Dworak, 1993). Also, the researcher conducted the exit interview with participants in a more comfortable setting that had the interviewee speak more openly and give more information (Garretson & Teel, 1992). The one-on-one interview provided a more relaxing and less formal environment for candidates and decreased self-consciousness.

Chapter 4

Change Framework

Conceptual frameworks are a type of intermediate theory that has the potential to connect to all aspects of inquiry (e.g., problem definition, purpose, literature review, methodology, data collection, and analysis) (Dorans, Sinharay, & Liang, 2011). Conceptual frameworks act like maps that give coherence to empirical inquiry (Shields & Tajalli, 2006). As an educator and social change agent, it is important to remember the five components of leadership, which are: (1) Moral Purpose, (2) Understanding Change, (3) Building Relationships, (4) Creating & Sharing Knowledge, and (5) Making Coherence (Fullan, 2004). I chose this change framework because it promotes how leaders must nurture leadership skills in others because we all can contribute to the improvement of an organization. Furthermore, this change framework endorses helping others confront problems that have not yet been successfully addressed. This was the case in my study. Teachers wanted to be confident in their ability to teach students with special needs, but lacked the pedagogical practices to do so.

Moral Purpose

Moral purpose is the understanding of the why of change. In the educational realm, moral purpose is about improving society through improving educational systems and therefore the learning of all. In education, moral purpose involves pledging to raise the bar and close the student achievement gap, for example, increasing academic achievement, with special attention to special needs students. As previously stated, differentiated instruction can be used as a measuring tool to enhance student achievement. The IEP is developed for the students' academic year, which gives annual

measurable goals to work towards, and lists all related services the students are able to receive. The IEP is designed for the students' to perform on their academic level. The goals are developed according to students' weaknesses in each subject area. If the students are working on their academic level, this will lessen the frustrations and/or inappropriate behaviors of the students. This is why it is important for teachers to scaffold their lessons to meet the needs of the lower level learner. If the IEP is implemented properly and differentiated instruction exists in the classroom, special education students will have an opportunity for a successful academic year.

Understanding Change

According to Fullan (2004), making change work requires the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those implementing improvements. Understanding change is about establishing the condition for continuous improvement to continue and overcome inevitable barriers to reform. General and special education teachers should be knowledgeable of the special education laws. When special education students are in an inclusion setting, mainstreamed, or are in a special area class such as Spanish, art, or music, the general education teacher should be well informed about each special education student they are teaching. The general education teacher should read and implement the student's IEP through academic learning and behavior management of the student. The general education teacher should also sign a form stating they have read and have an understanding about the student's IEP.

For example, if a special education student is in an inclusion classroom, the general education teacher should be able to service the students in the absence of the special education teacher. The general education teacher does not completely understand

special education in terms of behavior plans, supplementary aids, modifications of assignments, tests and quizzes and students working on their academic level. General education teachers, special education teachers, as well as special area teachers must understand the importance of providing instruction that will give special needs students an equal opportunity to learn regardless of gender, cultural identity, disability, or socioeconomic status. In addition, having an open mind when developing lessons plans and strategies, as it pertains to students' needs is essential.

Building Relationships

The common denominator to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, teachers and schools get better. Building relationships helps to motivate and energize teachers. It also helps to forge relationships with general and special education teachers, which can have an overwhelming effect on the overall climate of the school.

Likewise, it is imperative that the general education and the special education teachers collaborate when it comes to special education students. It is essential that these teachers work together on developing lesson plans and discussing the components of differentiated instruction. This will contribute to enhancing the general education teacher's knowledge of the modifications and supplementary aids needed to assist in the student's successful academic learning. The general education teacher should perform her duties in any aspect she can to support the special education teacher.

Creating and Sharing Knowledge

Schools must encourage knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking. Continuous learning is endorsed when teachers are encouraged to add to their knowledge base, but

there will be little to add if they are not sharing this information among colleagues

(Fullan, 2004). Sharing knowledge is the key to continuous growth for all. Fullan (2004)

reminds teachers that they should always be engaged in practicing, studying, and refining

the craft of teaching. Knowledge creation and sharing promotes moral purpose in schools.

For instance, special education refers to education for students who may require

additional support to be successful students. It also refers to education for those students

who will not be able to compete in a regular classroom setting. Those students that

require additional support will be placed in an inclusion classroom setting and the

students who are not able to compete in a regular classroom setting are placed in a self-

contained classroom setting. Those students that are in an inclusion classroom would

interact with the general education teacher. Therefore, the general education teacher

should be knowledgeable of special education laws and also collaborate with the special

education teacher regarding special education students.

Making Coherence

Coherence making is the final stage to understanding change. Good leadership

requires an individual to make sense of the change. Leadership is difficult in a climate of

change because of the disequilibrium and people must understand what is happening

(Fullan, 2004). Once people start to make meaning of the change and it has coherence,

new patterns may emerge. In education it is important to focus on student learning as the

central tenet of reform and be cognizant of external ideas that further the vision and

thinking of the school.

As a result of the lack of shared vision, power struggles and miscommunication

come into play between special and general education teachers. The general education

teacher tends to think of the special education teacher as a paraprofessional (teacher's assistant) instead as their equal (Scruggs et al., 2007). Sometimes, the general education teacher will not permit the special education to perform certain duties in the classroom, such as teaching lessons and planning activities. Some general education teachers believe the special education teacher should work with only the special education students, but the special education students are not supposed to be singled out from the general education students (Huefner, 1988).

It is imperative that the general education teacher understands the specifics of the IEP as it relates to the students with special needs. If the IEP states a student should be allotted additional time to complete assignments, quizzes, and tests, then it should be honored by both the special and general education teacher. The IEP may also express shortening and modifying assignments, tests, and quizzes and giving students assignments on their functioning academic level. The general and special education teachers must be able to communicate with each other to provide both general and special education students with a quality education.

In addition, the data analysis process takes into consideration specific variables that are impactful. One of the major challenges that schools across the country have to deal with is distinguishing the difference between a student with learning disabilities and a student with behavioral health problems. In most cases, the student will eventually end up in a special education classroom where he or she may not get the proper instruction to achieve academic success. The ultimate goal of this study was to provide teachers with techniques and strategies that would assist the students with special needs.

Overview of Action Research Project

Cycle One: Focus Groups December 11, 2013.

Purpose. The purpose of Cycle One was to get the understanding of teachers' perception of teacher efficacy as it related to instructing students with special needs. Also, this cycle helped to answer research question one: What were general and special education teachers' perception of their efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs? This also helped the participants focus on the concerns, fears, opinions, and generalized feelings about themselves.

Action. In this action research study, Cycle One consisted of a focus group for those who decided to participate in the study. During the focus group, the researcher met with all the participants on a whole to explain my study and answer any questions that the participants had. They were given a pre-study questionnaire. I then asked nine open-ended questions in regards to teacher efficacy, differentiated instruction, and pedagogical practices to generate discussion. Throughout the focus group, I mentioned that if the participants did not want to participate or changed their mind at any time, they could withdraw from the study. The focus group took 45-90 minutes to respect the time of the teachers. I also conducted a professional development session for the nine participants in which we discussed support strategies that would aid and support lower level learners and students with special needs. As the facilitator of the professional development, my duties were to discuss the support strategies and elaborate in great detail of how I came up with the themes. I was given a list of teachers who were willing to participate. After I gave a brief introduction and explained my credentials and my interest. At that point, I started

my professional development because teachers were already engaged and they made the commitment.

   Data collected. In Cycle One, the researcher collected data from the pre questionnaire, pre assessment, and focus group questions and answers were transcribed to guide the one-to-one questions for Cycle Two. The first process of the data collection was to have participants write down and share their experiences at Community Advancement Preparatory School. The second process was to gather data on teachers' perceptions of their teacher efficacy as related to the students with special needs. The third process was to focus on participants and their willingness to participate in the study. Each component represented an opportunity for the researcher to observe and monitor the participants' natural setting with teachers, administrators, and peer groups. Collaboration between participants and the researcher was needed to develop classroom projects and assignments geared to empowering the school community, building relationships with parents, community members, and the administration.

   Cycle Two: One-to-One Interviewing Week of February 18-24, 2014.

   Purpose. The purpose of Cycle Two was to gain deeper knowledge about teacher perceptions of their efficacy based off data collected in Cycle One. Specifically, I conducted interviews with participants in the study. Also, Cycle Two helped to answer research question number one: What were general and special education teachers' perceptions of their teacher efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs? The goal was to get the participants to express their genuine feelings about Community Advancement Preparatory School without concern or hesitation. The contribution from

the participants was necessary because they shared a vested interest in the students at CAPS.

Action. Interviewing my participants allowed me to get valuable and reliable information that had a rich description of the occurrence being studied. In addition, the interviews were tape-recorded, affording me the opportunity to be from extensive note-taking during the interview process (Seidman, 1998). According to Gudmundsdottir (1996), "an almost infinite number of words are spoken; few are heard and written down, but most words fall on deaf ears and are lost forever" (p. 296).

Data collection. The interviews were conducted at the school, in the teachers' classrooms, as the setting was critical to the openness and frankness of the participants' discussions (Creswell, 1998). In addition, the interviews were scheduled to last approximately 45-90 minutes. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes.

Cycle Three: Support Mechanisms March 21, 2014

Purpose. The purpose of Cycle Three was to implement support mechanisms in the classroom for students with special needs. Also Cycle Three helped answer research question four. How did educators use differentiated instruction to increase academic success for students with special needs? Cycle Three events evolved simultaneously during the Cycle Three timeframe from March 21, 2014 through April 30, 2014. The purpose of this particular cycle was to discuss support mechanisms for students with special needs. This cycle provided the researcher with the chance to reflect upon the nine researched-based strategies that were emergent themes from Cycles One, Two, and Three. The nine researched based strategies are: Accommodation, Learning Style,

Engaged Learning, Behavior Intervention, Teacher Support strategies, Effective Instruction practices, Response to Intervention, Instructional Interventions, and Classroom Management.

Action. Within this cycle, the participants were able to use two of the nine intervention strategies in their classroom based on the student and teacher individual needs. Each participant would have to explain why they chose that particular intervention and what was the outcome, effective or non-effective. Participants had one marking period to record, observe, and produce field notes. Cycle Three includes daily monitoring of students in class instruction as well pedagogical practices that would assist in student learning. These components in Cycle Three provided the researcher with the information needed to identify and discuss the issues and concerns from the participants in Cycle Four.

Data collection. Cycle Three involved the collection of significant data regarding the participants' perspective on support mechanisms for students with special needs. The active and authentic involvement of participants has been identified as a key factor in empowering students in the classroom. Personalized experiences concerning the participants in this cycle can be instrumental in communicating ideas and influencing change. The first process was to implement two strategies that allowed students to achieve their goals and objectives in the classroom. The second process was to gather data on the specific support mechanisms that teachers chose for their classroom. Participants monitored students to see if the support mechanisms were effective in the classroom. The third process was for the participants to submit their observations, field notes, or write-ups to the researcher so he could analyze the data.

Cycle Four: Exit Interview and Post Assessment June 20, 2014.

Purpose. The purpose of Cycle Four was to conclude Cycles One through Four by collecting exit interview data as well as post assessment data. Also, the purpose of Cycle Four was to answer research question number four: How did my leadership foster the development of teacher efficacy to impact students with special needs? The third purpose of Cycle Four of this action research project was to gather relevant data and infuse triangulation. In general, it is best if researchers do not rely on only one single source of data or on any one type of data collection tool. Research is stronger if the information is collected in a variety of ways

Action. During this cycle, participants had an opportunity to discuss and address any issues or concern related to the study that was conducted at Community Advancement Preparatory School during the 2013-2014 school year. The researcher provided an open forum so the participants could talk about their views. In addition, the participants were able to discuss their perceptions and interpretations in regards to a given situation. It was their expression from their point of view. A key advantage of observation research is it provided opportunities for the researcher to observe respondents in their natural setting.

The focal point of this cycle was program development. The Professional Learning Committee (PLC) was developed to help define a problem, why it is a problem, and present the findings. The purpose of developing this program was to improve academic achievement. Teachers were the participants in this group, they completed questionnaires pertaining to the students and they created a format on how they would track the student's achievement.

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The Professional Learning Committee met once a week for 45 minutes and was be guided by four themes: Knowledge of Cultural Responsive Teaching, Differentiated Instruction, Pedagogical Practices to Improve Student Success, and Teacher Efficacy. The group meetings allowed an opportunity to share, reflect on their practice, and learn from other colleagues.

Data collection. During my focus group, the researcher met with all the participants on a whole to explain the study again and answer any questions that the participants had. The researcher then posed three open-ended questions in regards to teacher efficacy, differentiated instruction, and pedagogical practices to generate discussion. Then I, as the researcher, mentioned that the participants did not have to put their name on the questionnaire because I wanted to protect the identity of the participants.

The researcher distributed the Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale directly after the focus group. The researcher met with each participant in hopes of collecting rich thick description (Yin, 2003). In this action research design, the researcher's ultimate goal was to implement effective change. I, as the researcher, wanted to meet with each participant to discuss my findings and to make relevant recommendations. The purpose of the exit interview was to further triangulate my data and inform future researchers in Chapter V of implications for future research.

Data Analysis for Methodology

Data analysis entails gathering information, determining themes, allocating information into categories, and writing a qualitative report (Creswell, 1998). In order to identify questions, patterns, and emergent themes, the data collection has to be on going

and inductive (Maxwell, 1996). Also, data analysis should be conducted concurrently within the data collection period. In other words, data collection and data analysis should be conducted at the same time during qualitative work (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). With regard to this study, the data collection and analysis was a continuous cycle. Specifically, the transcribed interviews were coded to derive the themes and categories that formed the basis of the research (Creswell, 1998). The data in earlier stages of the collection process were used to inform future stages of the research. Moreover, the purpose of coding is to connect the information, develop patterns and themes to shape the data. "Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected information (i.e., observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 133).

Qualitative data collected from focus group meetings, interviews, observations, and journal entries were color-coded and categorized by placing them in a binder and tabulating them. These data were analyzed by rereading all transcribed focus group responses, interviews, journal entries, and observations to analyze the use of teacher efficacy. Triangulation was ethically used to confirm and verify the processes authenticity with the various data sources used (Yin, 1984). The use of member checking was used for accuracy of field notes, observations, and interview transcripts. When the predominant themes surfaced, we had come to the completion of the study (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

After the interviews had been transcribed, member checking was used and the transcripts and notes of the final version of the study were emailed to the participants so

that they could make certain that they were being accurately represented in the study (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). All documents will be destroyed at the end of the research study as another way to safeguard the identities of the individuals.

The data gathered for quantitative data entailed the Bandura teacher efficacy scale in which a basic descriptive analysis was conducted. For this analysis, the survey results were organized and the mean response among all nine teachers for all pre- and post-survey questions was calculated. Following this procedure, to determine if any significant difference existed between pre- and post-survey questions for each teacher, data were first subjected to a Shapiro–Wilk's test for normality to determine if the data satisfy the assumption of a paired t-test. The data presentation can be displayed by using graphs and/or charts utilizing the Microsoft Office Excel Spreadsheet application.

Triangulating the Data

The data collected for this research used an array of diverse techniques. The procedure used is known as triangulation. Triangulation is the desire to use multiple sources of data to merge reliability and trustworthiness into the study and its findings (Glesne, 2006; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). For this research study, "…triangulation in order to increase confidence in research findings" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36) was implemented so as not to rely on any single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) state simply, "Researchers use this model when they want to compare results or to validate, confirm, or corroborate quantitative findings" (p. 65). Merriam (1998) defines triangulation to be the process of using "multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (p. 204). Creswell and Plano-

Clark (2011) emphasize that this research design offers a strong base for triangulation; there are multiple sources to gather data.

As described in previous sections, qualitative researchers rely on an assortment of methods for collecting data. Moreover, the ability to implement a multiple data-collection method enhances the trustworthiness of the data; this exercise is generally called triangulation (Glesne, 2006). Multiple data-collection methods is the most practical form of triangulation in qualitative research. This method can increase confidence in research findings and involve the integration of multiple kinds of data sources, multiple theoretical perspectives, and multiple investigators (Glesne, 2006).

Interviewing, qualitative inquiry, and document collections are different strands that govern data-gathering techniques. For the purposes of this study, the data were triangulated during the data collection process as well as the data analysis phase. The researcher triangulated the data by conducting one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires to ensure that the data was triangulated.

Chapter 5

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to make evident that students and teachers would benefit from a professional development aimed at impacting teachers' self-efficacy towards working with special need students. Also, this study indirectly assisted in preparing students with special needs to meet their individual goals by providing specialized instructional strategies in a structured environment that supported and enhanced their learning potential. (Delpit, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Lin et al., 2008). This study was inspired by general and special education teachers who wanted to increase their levels of teacher efficacy and incorporate strategies that could assist in instructing special need students. Therefore, this study was designed to assist in the enhancement of pedagogical practices, with a focus on impacting the self-efficacy of general education, special education, and special area teachers.

To address the proposed research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were employed in this action research study. Mills (2007) defines action research as "any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers" (p. 5). Albert Bandura (1994) defines efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). In consideration of these definitions, this study aimed to determine if participation in professional development focused on teachers' current skill sets, attitudes, and confidence levels had an impact on teachers' belief in their ability to teach special needs students.

Upon initially being granted permission to conduct the study at Community Advancement Preparatory School (CAPS), preliminary observations demonstrated that teachers were unsure on how to instruct students with special needs and were often hesitant in implementing their instructional strategies. The preliminary observations consisted of informal conversations between participants and me where they shared their issues and concerns related to the influx of special need students at CAPS. Some of the teacher/participant concerns were: managing student behavior, how to make/address accommodations and modifications, how to implement differentiated instruction, and teacher/participant lack of preparedness in working with students with special needs. Because of a likely lack of confidence in their ability to teach students with special needs, teachers may have become apprehensive about their ability to instruct the students. Conversely, when students have a teacher who is confident about her ability to deliver instruction, and is knowledgeable about the students' academic backgrounds, these students become more empowered to accelerate academically, socially, and emotionally (Klassen, 2010a). In turn, this will enhance the student's self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Revisiting the Action Research Design

Action research has been supported and utilized by scholars as having the effect of increasing teachers' feeling of empowerment (Dana, Yendol- Hoppey, & Snow-Gerono, 2006; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). In particular, these scholars have concluded that action research is designed to be carried out by educators, and if at all possible, in cooperation with at least one other educator (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003; Hendricks, 2006; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Merther, 2006; Thomas, 2005; Tomal, 2003). Action

research is a philosophical process that is meant to provide a framework for educators to analyze what goes on with students within their respective educational facilities (Merther, 2006). Action research is a way for teachers to feel empowered to find solutions to their own problems (Mills, 2007).

I chose the action research model because it allowed me as the researcher to be recursive in my approach. It allowed me to plan, act, observe, and reflect as an active practitioner in my study. Also "teachers become more effective when encouraged to examine and assess their own work and then consider ways of working differently" (Watts, 1985, p. 118). The action research design was conducted with the goal that the research would educate and modify teachers' practices in the future. This study gave teachers an opportunity to assess themselves by examining their own teaching in a structured environment.

This study followed the participatory action research model and consisted of four cycles. According to McIntyre (2008), participatory action research is "an approach to exploring the processes by which participants engage in collaborative, action-based projects that reflect their knowledge and mobilizes their desires" (p. 89). In action research, each cycle provides data that inform the next cycle ultimately leading to an outcome based solution to a problem (Craig, 2009). In the case of my study, I enhanced teachers' ability to work with special education students.

There were four cycles in this study. The first cycle consisted of an initial information session that introduced potential study participants to the purpose of my action research study. This cycle also included collecting baseline data using the Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale (Appendix B) and a focus group interview (Appendix C). The

second cycle consisted of face-to-face interviews (Appendix A) that elicited data on school demographics, school culture, and the teachers' ability to instruct students with special needs. Cycle three included the design and implementation of intervention strategies for teachers to instruct students with special needs and lower level learners. The fourth cycle was supporting and expanding the intervention techniques by conducting a focus group that addressed managing behavior, modifications and accommodations, implementing differentiated instruction, and lack of preparedness in working with students with special needs at CAPS, as well as techniques that were implemented. The fourth cycle also consisted of a post Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale assessment as well as a focus group that consisted of nine impact questions.

Cycle One: Pre-Planning and Benchmark Data

 Data collected. The purpose of Cycle One was to understand the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding teacher efficacy as related to instructing students with special needs. Therefore, I focused on understanding the school culture and special education needs at Community Advancement Preparatory School (CAPS) by collecting and analyzing data pertaining to general and special education teachers who served students with special needs.

 This research study was approved by the CAPS superintendent, who also recognized that teachers in the school district needed more support working with the influx of special education students. The superintendent suggested that this may be a direct result from CAPS becoming a school choice district. School choice is a program in which parents and students from neighboring towns and school districts can choose the school district they would like to attend (Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, (2000).

Therefore, Cycle One was initiated as an initial information training session on December 11th, 2013 from 1:00pm to 3:30pm. The initial information training session consisted of an overview of the study, which included a personal introduction and my role as the researcher, selective awareness test and note taking exercise, observations and field notes, the administration of Pre Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale and a focus group. This study utilized a purposeful sample (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) of 16 teachers from CAPS who agreed to participate. There were eight special education teachers and eight general education teachers who had particular subject area focuses including music, library, art, and Spanish. Following the initial information training session, seven participants decided not to participate because of scheduling issues and conflict of interests. As a result, nine participants completed all four cycles of the action research process. In terms of experience, six participants were teachers who had 10 plus years in the field of education. The remaining three teachers were not new to the field of education, but rather new to the school and the culture of CAPS.

In terms of demographics, the nine participants were all female teachers who specialized in a grade level between pre-school to eighth grade. Of these nine teachers, four were special education teachers, two were special area teachers (music and art) and the three remaining included a pre-school teacher, a kindergarten teacher, and a K-8 gifted and talented teacher. The participating teachers averaged 11 years of teaching experience. All nine participants had a Bachelor's degree and one teacher was currently working towards her Master's degree in education.

Data for Cycle One was collected through observations, the selective awareness test, note-taking exercise, and focus groups which were recorded as field notes and

reflective journal entries. The field notes focused on my observations during the initial information training session (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). These observations permitted me to take part in the activities and discussions that were assessed to determine the participants' professional perspective on instructing lower level learners and students with special needs. The information associated with these field notes helped me to gain insight into the combined perspectives of the nine observed teachers. Journal entries involved recording reactions and concerns during the initial information training session (Thomas et al., 2011). Data for Cycle One also included the results of the pre-test of Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale.

Orientation Activities

In this component of the cycle, I discussed the purpose of action research and the rationale for its use in this study. I also shared with the potential participants the study's timeline, which started December 2013 and ended June 2014. I discussed the extent of researcher and teacher investment as well as the expectations for participants and the research. I also discussed each cycle in the study and how it would contribute to teacher efficacy and in turn enhance the learning among special needs students. In addition, it was explained that participation in this study would help produce data that might have the potential of expanding upon findings from previous studies, thus impacting future educational reform.

The purpose of the initial informational training session was to determine the needs of study participants so that I could share intervention and pedagogical strategies to assist teachers and the district in their desire to better serve students with special needs. I began with a detailed introduction of myself and my experience with special needs

students. This step was implemented to help me establish a rapport and build confidence with the potential participants regarding my ability to conduct the study. Following this step, I thoroughly described the study's purpose and why the superintendent approved this study for the school district.

According to the superintendent, there had been a large influx of special needs students within the last 10 years. As a result, teachers found it very challenging to instruct students with special needs. I spoke to Dr. Leatherwood, the superintendent of the school district, in August of 2013, and she explained the root cause of the influx of students with special needs over the last 10 years. CAPS is an inter-district school choice program which enables approved choice districts to enroll non-resident students without cost to parents. This program increased educational opportunities for students and families by providing students with school options outside of their district of residence giving parents the power to select a school that best served their child's individual needs.

As a result of this program, an exceptionally high number of students with special needs opted to enroll in CAPS. Parents and students who chose to take advantage of school choice tended to come from communities with low performing schools and therefore brought their own problems from their home and/or community to CAPS (McCormick, Eick, & Womack, 2013). Therefore, I wanted to utilize an action research design to provide teachers with classroom resources and strategies and to produce effective instruction for students with special needs.

The selective awareness test. After the introduction, I showed a video entitled "The Invisible Gorilla" (Simons & Chabris, 1999). The Invisible Gorilla Test video included an activity that allowed teachers to put themselves in the shoes of students with

special needs. When a person develops selective awareness, it becomes easy for someone to miss details when one is not looking for them. The video was designed to have the participants miss things that special education students would typically miss. The first activity involved participants watching the awareness test video. Participants were given a set of strict instructions to follow which was to keep an accurate count of how many times the ball was passed in the video. In my journal on January 14, 2014, I wrote:

Teachers were fixated on counting how many times the ball was passed. The first time the video was shown the participants in each group came up with different numbers. All of the participants were trying to convince each other that the number they came up with was the correct number. After the first showing of the video I asked participants if they noticed anything unusual in the video. Each participant responded no. The second time showing the video the level of concentration among participants was elevated. Everyone was fixated on coming up with the correct number of times the ball was passed. No one was paying attention to anything going on around them.

In this video, there was also a man dressed as an ape that was dancing through the circle those participants was not supposed to notice. Participants watched the video three times, and each time they came up with the same number of times the ball was passed, which was 15 times. At the end of each showing of the video, I asked participants if they saw anything unusual in the video. Each time all of the participants responded no. After viewing the video the third time, I asked participants if they happened to see the ape dancing in the video. They all were

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puzzled and answered no. I played the video for them a fourth time and all of the teachers saw the dancing ape. All of the participants were shocked to learn that they missed the dancing ape, which was in plain sight. (Field Notes, January 14, 2014)

When the ape danced across the floor in the video I was watching the facial expressions of the participants. I knew that once again no one noticed the dancing ape because their facial expression did not change. At the end of the second showing I asked participants again if they noticed anything unusual. Once again everyone responded no. I asked each group how many times the ball was passed. This time everyone had the same number. I asked everyone if they were sure. One participant responded: "Well now you have me second guessing myself because you are asking me if I am sure. On second thought maybe we missed something."

Another participant said: "Why do you keep asking us if we noticed something unusual?" I could see that participants were becoming curious of what I was asking about. The third showing of the video participants was concentrating on the number of times the ball was passed. The room was so quiet because everyone was counting in their heads and focused. At the end of the third showing I asked again how many times the ball was passed. Each group came up with the same number as the previous showing. I asked for the last time if anyone saw something unusual. They all responded no.

One participant said: "Come on tell us. What are we missing?" I then asked them if anyone happened to see the dancing ape in the video. It was a brief pause as group participants looked around at each other. Some participants starting laughing and some looked in disbelief. One participant stated: "No way. There is no way we could have missed that." Another participant said: "Come on, I am sure if there was a dancing ape in the video at least one of us would have seen it." I couldn't wait to show the video a fourth time and see their faces. I played the video a fourth time. The room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Everyone was determined to not miss the dancing ape a fourth time. As soon as the dancing ape appeared in the video, the room filled with laughter. They were astonished that they missed something "hiding" in plain sight. They began to talk among themselves about how they missed the dancing ape three times (Field Notes, January 14, 2014).

This activity was used to show how students with special needs react to learning activities and assignments. When given a specific task, students with special needs tend to hyper-focus on that one task and fail to pay attention to everything else going on around them.

This video led to a great discussion. I talked about how students with special needs tend to concentrate on a given task and ignore everything else going on around them. One participant stated: "We are educated teachers without a disability and we missed the mark three times. Imagine how it must feel for our special education students who have to live with this every day." Teachers were intrigued and wanted to learn more about how special education students learn. Teachers wanted to know how to cope with

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the students who were task-oriented and may not finish a complete assignment because they focused on the first part of the assignment and ignored everything else. I explained to them this is why IEPs and accommodations are so important for special needs students. The special education teachers know their students best and understand how they learn. I told teachers to use the IEP as their greatest tool and whenever possible get a general idea of how each special education student learns because it will help them in the classroom. I told participants to always remember this activity and remember how it made them feel when they realized they missed something so obvious (Field Notes, January 14, 2014).

Note taking exercise. The second activity involved participants taking notes with their non-dominant hand as I quickly read a passage to them. This task was coupled with me speaking really fast and not repeating anything. The teachers were very frustrated because they were unable to keep up and could not understand their own handwriting. I wanted the participants to understand how students with special needs felt on a daily basis. Participants began to understand why students in their classrooms tended to get easily frustrated with simplest tasks. I recorded in my field notes:

Many of the participants kept erasing what they were writing. Every time someone erased something they wanted me to repeat it. When I told someone I was not repeating something they got upset. One teacher kept slamming her pen down from frustration. Another teacher turned very red in the face because she was unable to keep up with the note-taking.

A teacher said: "How can we make sure we are taking accurate notes if you are unwilling to repeat anything?" She raised her voice a little as she asked me this

question. It was clear that frustration was getting the best of all the participants. One participant stated: "Do you have to talk so fast? There is no way that I can keep up with you writing with my left hand." I noticed how one teacher quit in the middle of the note-taking exercise because she was overcome with frustration. She slammed her pencil down and shook her head repeatedly. She responded: "What is the point of you talking so fast? You moved on to the next sentence before we even finished writing. That is not fair."

These teachers started to exhibit some of the same behaviors as my students with special needs when they get frustrated. Another teacher blurted out: "I am starting to feel like you are doing this on purpose." I kept a straight face the whole time during this exercise so they could not determine if I was doing this deliberately. At the end of the note taking activity, I could see that everyone was visibly upset or overly frustrated. I walked around to all of the participants to see what they had written down on their papers. No one had it written down exactly as I read it to them. Several participants writing were illegible and many had sentence fragments. I asked participants to give me a general idea of what they were taking notes on. No one could tell me with certainty because they were so fixated on trying to write with their non-dominant hand.

I asked the participants to describe to me what they were feeling during this exercise. Several words came to their mind: annoyed, frustrated, inadequate, feeling of failure and disrespected. I asked one participant to expound on why she felt disrespected. Her response: "Because you saw that we were all struggling, and

yet you did not care. The fact that I was asking for your help and you ignored me. That made me feel terrible." This led to a discussion of how students with special needs become so easily frustrated.

One teacher responded: "I really understood how it felt to have a disability. A lot of times I tend to think that students with special needs are overreacting when they cannot complete a task as fast or accurate as others. But the level of frustration I felt was real and I will approach things differently now." Participants were glad to have been a part of this exercise because it allowed them to feel what special needs students feel on a daily basis. (Field Notes, January 14, 2014)

We had a short question and answer period immediately after the activity. Following the short question and answer period, I began discussing the unique issues at CAPS. The first unique issue discussed was the fact that this district was a school choice district. I also discussed the influx of special needs students within the last decade. That influx and change over time had altered the culture of the school district and the climate of teacher efficacy inside the building. In recent years, there was a disconnect between special education and general education teachers and an increased need for effective instruction for students with special needs (Ikegula, 2009).

Teacher pre-questionnaire. In order to address this disconnect, the researcher distributed the Bandura pre-test Self-Efficacy Scale that allowed the participants to rate their beliefs in their abilities to instruct students and influence student performance. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was used to measure how teachers' beliefs and attitudes

affected the way they taught, and their perceptions, judgments, decision-making, and actions in the classroom.

The Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Dr. Albert Bandura (1997) to examine teachers' perceptions regarding their ability to influence the outcome of their students within the classroom. This scale served as a pre-assessment to determine the level of efficacy among teachers in the study. This model included seven subscales that consist of 30 items. The seven subscales were as follows: (1) decision making, (2) resources, (3) discipline, (4) instruction, (5) parental involvement, (6) community involvement, and (7) school involvement. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale enabled participants to rate themselves and provided baseline data that could be utilized to develop intervention strategies for these teachers.

The 5-point scale ranged from A (nothing) to E (great deal) (Appendix B). For this particular study, a pre- and post-Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was given out to the participants to monitor progress from the beginning of the study to the conclusion of the study. Bandura (1977) defines efficacy as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome" (p. 193). Further, Pajares (1996) suggests that efficacy is a content-specific construct. This means that a person with an overall well-developed self-concept can still have a low sense of efficacy when it comes to teaching.

These questions were evaluated by using a one-dimensional and ordered scale, known as a Likert scale. This scale was the result of respondents indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the teachers' perception of how they can effectively instruct their students (Patton, 2002). As stated by the Independent

Institute of Education (2012), "the likert scale is very convenient when the researcher wants to measure a construct" (p. 13). "Not only is it a pleasingly simple way of gauging specific opinions, but it also lends itself very easily to the construction of multiple-item measures, known as Likert scales, which can measure broader attitudes and values" (Johns, 2010, p. 1).

To commence, a basic descriptive analysis was conducted. For this analysis, the survey results were organized and the mean response among all nine teachers for all pre- and post-survey questions was calculated. Data from the pre-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teacher Pre Self-Efficacy Scale Response Results

Questions	Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
Efficacy to Influence Decision Making					
How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?	0%	14%	47%	34%	5%
How much can you express your views freely on important school matters?	0%	5%	29%	47%	19%
Efficacy to Influence School Resources					
How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need?	0%	0%	5%	47%	48%

Table 1 (continued)

Questions	Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
Instructional Self-Efficacy					
How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school?	33%	48%	9%	10%	0%
How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	0%	0%	9%	76%	15%
How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home?	0%	10%	24%	61%	5%
How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?	0%	0%	9%	62%	29%
How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons?	0%	9%	19%	52%	20%
How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?	0%	0%	24%	66%	10%
How much can you do to get students to work together?	0%	0%	14%	76%	10%
How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?	0%	14%	53%	28%	5%
How much can you do to get children to do their homework?	0%	19%	43%	33%	5%

Table 1 (continued)

Questions	Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
Disciplinary Self-Efficacy					
How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	0%	0%	10%	57%	33%
How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	0%	0%	5%	66%	29%
How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on the school grounds?	0%	0%	14%	81%	5%
Efficacy to Enlist Parental Involvement					
How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities?	0%	14%	52%	24%	10%
How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school?	0%	5%	47%	29%	19%
How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school?	0%	0%	10%	62%	28%
Efficacy to Enlist Community Involvement					
How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools?	0%	24%	33%	38%	5%

Table 1 (continued)

Questions	Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school?	14%	28%	34%	19%	5%
How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school?	5%	24%	33%	38%	0%
How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school?	0%	29%	38%	33%	0%

Efficacy to Create a Positive School Climate

Questions	Nothing	Very Little	Some Influence	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
How much can you do to make the school a safe place?	0%	0%	5%	42%	53%
How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?	0%	0%	0%	53%	47%
How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?	0%	0%	9%	38%	53%
How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills?	0%	10%	29%	47%	14%
How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to the make the school run effectively?	0%	10%	19%	57%	14%
How much can you do to reduce school dropout?	13%	47%	33%	7%	0%
How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism?	0%	24%	38%	38%	0%
How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	0%	0%	5%	48%	47%

Data Analysis of Pre-Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale

As I reviewed and analyzed the data from the Pre-Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale, I categorized the scale into three different parts:; some influence, quite a bit, and a great deal. As I began to look at instructional self-efficacy, many of the teachers appeared to score high. As the researcher, I wanted to know what I could do to produce even better scores. There was still room for improvement. The ultimate goal was for 100% of participants to feel very confident in their abilities when it comes to instructing students with special needs.

The data revealed in the Pre-Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale showed that teachers were allowed to rate themselves in seven areas. The areas of efficacy to influence decision-making, efficacy to enlist community involvement, and efficacy to create a positive school climate are where teachers had the lowest efficacy levels. In the area of efficacy to influence decision-making, the majority of teachers felt that they had very little to some influence in these decisions. Over 60% of teachers believed they only had some influence in decisions made in the school. Furthermore, over 30% of teachers felt that they had some influence when it pertained to expressing their views freely on important school matters. On the other hand, 47% of teachers felts that they were able to express their views on important school matters.

In the area of instructional self-efficacy, teachers believed that there was nothing or very little that they could do to influence the class sizes in their school. This was supported by over 80% of teachers feeling this way. Over 65% of teachers believed that they had very little to some influence to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on student learning. Also, many teachers felt that there was not much they

could do to get children to do their homework. The data revealed that 59% of teachers believed they only had some influence in getting students to do their homework.

Focus Group Interview

The final phase of Cycle One was a focus group. During the focus group, the researcher asked several questions pertaining to: teacher instruction, pedagogical practices, and culturally responsive teaching (Appendix C). Initially, the participants were reluctant to answer the questions because they were anxious that the researcher would release the information to their Principal or their Immediate Supervisors. Once the researcher reiterated to the participants that the information that they shared would remain confidential and the researcher would not disclose any information to anyone throughout the study, the teachers opened up and provided detailed answers to focus group questions.

Commonly, focus group research is "a way of collecting qualitative data, which essentially involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues" (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). The major goal of focus group interviews is to comprehend and clarify the values, beliefs, and cultures that impact the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals. A focus group comprises people chosen and assembled by researchers to examine and discuss, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Powell, Single, & Lloyd, 1996).

By the same token, open-ended questions allowed the participants in the study to answer questions using their own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A 16-question interview protocol was developed and administered, tape recorded, and transcribed to

nine certificated staff that consisted of special area teachers, as well as general and special education teachers assigned to CAPS. The questionnaire consisted of three major components that pertained to the teachers' ability to instruct students, different methods of instructing these students, as well as examining the teachers' style in reference to instructing these students. The questions that the researcher asked the participants were pivotal to this research because they drove the next cycle, which consisted of face-to-face interviews. By observing the pattern of responses in the focus group, I separated the commonly shared thoughts from the highly personal. The focus group interview delivered an immediate sense of which opinions and behaviors were pervasive among participants.

Themes from focus group. The focus group had three major themes. The first theme focused on school culture; the second theme focused on modifications and accommodations for students with special needs; and the third theme focused on the struggle to achieve self-efficacy. The developing and maintaining of positive relationships with teachers and administration is an important component of establishing a positive school culture. When schools have a positive school culture, teacher performance will be better, which ultimately leads to improved student performance.

Theme One: School culture (Family Atmosphere / Collaborative). When I walked into the school, I noticed that teachers, administrators, and custodial personnel were very friendly. The appearance of the school was well maintained. The hallways were clean as well as the classrooms, the bathrooms were in excellent condition and the perimeter of the school was in great shape and kid friendly. As I focused on school culture, one of the aspects that came out is the family atmosphere that permeated the school. Through conversation, teachers would discuss how working amongst co-workers

was like working with family. Bolman and Deal (2008) referenced the importance of the human resource framework, which fosters a family atmosphere in organizations. This framework suggests that people need organizations and organizations need people. The teachers also reported that the support of administration was a huge success for CAPS and that having this support made it easier for them to do their jobs. This notion was highlighted by one teacher asserting:

> I think because of the administration here, it tends to be a very positive group of people and because of the funding opportunities we have. If a teacher or group of teachers comes up with an idea, more often than not that idea will get put into motion without any obstacles.

Another faculty member shared how CAPS is like a close-knit family. She shared:

> In CAPS if you're around long enough you will feel the family atmosphere and I think that's one of our biggest strengths in this school system, our size. And if you're here long enough you've taught parents of these students and that is just an awesome feeling. You know them and know the families very well and feel very confident, calling them on the phone asking for anything or asking for support so those types of things in this kind of small environment is phenomenal.

Another teacher added; "And even though we've grown, we are so small so we do know the students."

Another aspect of school culture that surfaced was collaborative culture, in which teachers were working together. Similar to the family atmosphere, there was a comradery amongst teachers and administrators. DuFour (1998) characterizes a collaborative culture as groups of educators who "work together to analyze and improve their classroom

practice…engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning" (p. 9).

Research shows that collaboration between teachers can be an influential tool for professional development and a catalyst for school improvement by providing "opportunities for adults across a school system to learn and think together about how to improve their practice in ways that lead to improved student achievement" (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 2). Collaboration that is focused on improved academic instruction benefits both teachers and students. Promoting a collaborative culture within schools allows for teachers to combine expertise and meet the needs of all learners.

Some participants shared the planning tools, strategies, and resources they utilized to assist with accommodating students with special needs. One participant noted:

> We bounce ideas of each other a lot. I will show the special ed. teachers the test I plan on giving or the lesson I am doing and I will ask for their feedback. I will ask things like this is what I'm doing can you look at it? How can I make it better? What can I do differently? Because that is their expertise and not necessarily mine, this is why I go to them because they are the experts. I'm always learning.

Teaching comes with its share of stress and burnout, but also comes with a sense of accomplishment and pride when helping children learn (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The Cycle One focus group ended with participants sharing how administration is very supportive of the needs of the teachers, which adds to the collaborative culture at CAPS. Another teacher shared her experience of administrative support at CAPS by stating:

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Anytime I've noticed the need for the student it's been met by administration, by other teachers, by people around the school. We'll send out e-mails asking if anyone has this program in their classroom, an extra laptop or chair, or a different desk. And either way we always get back to each other and it always seems to get handed to us in one way or another.

The teachers reported how oftentimes they are overwhelmed by the level of support they show each other. A teacher emphasized:

If you have a student that might need something that you can't provide you don't question going to another teacher and they won't say 'Oh it's not my student.' They'll go out of their way to make sure that they can help the student anyway they can to succeed.

It is clear that the teachers care about the students academically, socially, and emotionally. A family atmosphere fosters a sense of belonging. The atmosphere within a school contributes as much to the success of the student as the curriculum. The creation of a positive family atmosphere is the joint responsibility of administration and teachers. It filters down from the top when the entire professional staff is on the same page ethically, when the school's objectives are clearly understood and has buy-in from everyone, and when everyone feels that their contribution is essential.

Theme Two: Modifications and accommodations. Theme Two focused on how teachers in the study worked to achieve success for special needs children by making modifications and accommodations. According to the research, modifying and accommodating students with special needs is very important (Arllen, Gable, & Hendrickson, (1996). Many students with special needs require accommodations or

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strategies that help them perform at their grade level. Modifications provide productive learning experiences for students and are required to be addressed in the Individualized Education Plan. The first aspect of modifications and accommodations focused on the need to modify instruction and lesson plans.

To be sure, modifying lessons are not just for struggling students. When modifications are made, all students benefit. Modifications occur when changes are made in the instructional delivery method, assessment method, or both, to allow the student to have access to the same learning objectives. Overwhelmingly, all of the participants stated that they change their lesson plans to accommodate students with special needs. One teacher responded:

> I personally, in my subject try a product first and then observe very closely how they're reacting to that product and then change it as that lessons in place as I need to. So I don't try to just complete a lesson as I have it typed out. I change it along the way as I see it's needed.

Another participant explained:

> It is irresponsible on the part of the teacher to assume that one lesson will fit all students with challenges in his or her classroom. But in the same breath it is very challenging to change a lesson plan when you are dealing with a wide range of needs within the classroom.

One participant discussed how changing lessons can sometimes confuse students and leave some students behind. She expressed:

> Slight modifications to lessons can work to help learners with special needs in the classroom, but it's important not to make the changes and adaptations so large

that some students are left confused or lost, or having the higher level learners

being left on their own while you work with lower functioning students.

Participants felt that a huge benefit to changing lesson plans was helping students

achieve a particular learning objective. Further evidence is presented in additional data

from participants:

The result of changing lesson plans to accommodate students with special needs is

a classroom where specialized instruction is the norm for all students. Students

with special needs have access to appropriate modifications, while students who

excel have access to appropriate challenges.

"Changing lesson plans allows you to be responsive to the differences within the

classroom."

"Another benefit to changing lesson plans is it provides students with multiple

avenues to learning."

Modifying lesson plans allowed teachers to accommodate the needs of all

students within the classroom setting. Adjustments in the classroom environment, lesson

planning, and assessment, will help teachers accommodate and challenge each member of

their class and enable special needs students to have access to the same learning and the

same opportunity as other students to demonstrate what they have learned.

The second aspect of modifications focused on shifting teaching strategies when

students could not be reached. It is up to the teacher to ensure that appropriate strategies

are being used in the classroom to assist individual learning styles and provide success

for all students with special needs. Although there are a plethora of effective strategies to

be implemented within the classroom, the teachers were not very knowledgeable of

research-based teaching strategies that could be used in helping struggling students. Several teachers in the focus group came up with their own strategies to connect with students who were harder to reach. Teachers reported:

I try to do open projects where students give me the outcome, but then we give them numerous ways that they can get to that so they can show their creativity and show me a different way that they understand it, other than giving them one way.

When I do a demonstration, if I see it's not reaching everybody perhaps I'll research another tool that might be more accessible to different students to give them multiple ways to see something versus just my immediate reaction to discuss and show it might take something else for all of the students.

I am not aware of strategies that are successful in dealing with students who struggle academically. I try certain ideas that I have and see if they work. If they don't I regroup and try something else. I am sure there is an easier way to do things but I just don't know what those ways are. I am open to suggestions.

Focus group participants felt that the strategies mentioned would work for both general education and special needs students. However, certain factors hindered the effectiveness of those strategies such as how many students they taught, how basic the strategies were, and the modifications listed in a student's IEP.

Also within my study, teachers used differentiated instruction as an instructional tool to accommodate the learning needs of students. Differentiated instruction is a

teaching method used across the curriculum in an effort to reach each learner and spawn achievement. Every subject matter can be differentiated, however, it is imperative that educators access assorted streams of data to gauge the student's particular area of deficiency.

According to Walker (2012), data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that more than 65 percent of students across the United States fell under "proficient," "basic," or "below basic" mark in reading and math. Therefore, a number of teachers who employ differentiated instruction techniques foster the conditions where all learners' individualized academic needs are met and they can attain adequate progress.

Participants identified several factors that they considered in determining how and why to change their lesson plans and classroom activities such as: student interest, student behavior, IEPs, and ability. One participant noted that the subject being taught is also a factor in determining how to change lesson plans and classroom activities. This participant stated:

> I would say it depends on the subject too. There are certain subjects I know
> exactly what to do and how to work with them. And then subjects like writing
> every student is so different and we have so many kids in the classroom that I'll
> start working with someone and 45 minutes passed, then oops you've got another
> one sitting there doing nothing now. So that's the only, it's the subject and then
> the studying. We give them all the study skills, we work with them on it and then
> they come back and they didn't do any of it. So then it's like, are they retaining it?

Teachers also identified how student absences impact teaching schedules. This is supported by one teacher reporting: "Especially with the schedule at the middle school. If they're absent and we only see them three days a week we can't very well move on if they missed a whole lesson. That kind of throws you off too."

Occasionally, participants felt challenges associated with changing the lesson. All of the participants were in agreement in stating that sometimes it works and sometimes it does not. Participants felt that there was no exact or accurate way to change lesson plans that would work for all students with special needs. One participant stated:

Student needs vary by disability, and even then, children with the same diagnosis can have drastically different needs. So although I may be working with students with the same classification in a group setting, I may not see the same results for each student. So as I said it's hit or miss.

Focus group participants also identified the importance of building rapport with students with special needs. One teacher reported:

I just try to establish good rapport with the kids because no matter which population I'm working with I want them to be able to feel comfortable enough to come to me and say I don't get it and a lot of them do but I am still working on some of them. I think student-teacher rapport is really important.

The teachers used differentiated instruction to tailor instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiated content, process, products, or the learning environment, this has proved to be a successful approach to instruction. Differentiation consisted of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom.

Theme Three: The struggle to achieve self-efficacy. One of the aspects that came out of this theme was delivery of instruction. Although teachers modify instruction to meet the student needs, they still struggle to be self-efficacious in terms of their delivery of instruction. Essentially, that was what my study was all about, helping to enhance pedagogical approaches and teacher efficacy to instruct students with special needs. With the lack of teacher confidence, students will not benefit from instruction and may not meet their academic goals and objectives (Deplict, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Lin et al., 2008). Theme Three focused on the struggle to achieve self-efficacy in terms of their pedagogical approaches. Teachers were questioning how they should instruct lower level learners and if their techniques were effective.

Freire (1996) defined pedagogy as the artistry and craft of teaching. Pedagogy is the idea that addresses the nature and science through which instruction is delivered and learning is acquired (Freire, 1996). Unfortunately, and to the detriment of the students, an excessive amount of general and special education teachers are ill-equipped with the necessary experience and training that is vital to teaching students within the special needs population. (Jackson et al., 2009). It is crucial that these teachers adjust lesson planning and delivery that evokes a better understanding of the content and exercises the best pedagogical practices.

One teacher stated: "I have organizational issues. So I made up rubrics for every assignment type that they would have, so that's helping me. The more organized I am, I am helping my students become the same, you know what I mean?" Another teacher discussed how she is the opposite and tends to be too organized and how she wants to be more relaxed and laid back. She said:

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I'm exactly the opposite because I'm more rigid and I believe there is a place for everything so I am trying to let go a little bit and let them have a little more creative freedom. You know if the pencil isn't there just like that it's okay if it's right there.

A teacher discussed how she tries to accomplish too much without making contingencies for assemblies, snow days, and other factors that may impact learning. She stated:

I struggle with being a big idea person and I'll get this idea and I'm like oh that'll work so great and them implementing it is tough because it's a normal school so you have days that there's assemblies and snow days and you have all kinds of things that creep into you know the big plan that you had and then eventually seeing that plan through is tough because it's just hard scheduling. Trying to figure that out is my biggest struggle.

One teacher discussed how she avoids certain areas within the subject she teaches because she is not as confident in her abilities. She stated:

I think I have so many different areas within my subject and at times I might avoid areas that may be weaker for me. So offering opportunities in those areas for my students to help them grow and not avoiding it because it is a weakness of mine and seeking out sources that could help me balance my weakness and help me aid the students in the area I'm not quite as strong in is a win-win.

All of the focus group participants openly admitted that they at times may avoid or dread teaching certain lessons or activities that they are not that strong in.

The delivery of instruction was an area that teachers struggled with and ultimately affected their ability to achieve self-efficacy. There was a big difference in the manner in which teachers delivered their knowledge and skills while interacting with their students in the classroom. It was clear that teachers needed help in effectively engaging students in learning by using a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet individual learning needs. As educators, there is always room for improvement in regards to teaching students. Teachers must continue to grow in their profession. Being self-aware of areas to improve is the first step to growth. Increased knowledge in the delivery of instruction would help teachers communicate and interact with students in regards to academic content and would also support student engagement.

The second aspect of this theme was teacher confidence and impact on learning outcomes. Although teacher efficacy is a significant influence on behavior in the classroom, it was not the sole influence. In an educational setting such as public schools, other critical variables include skills, outcome expectations, and the presumed value of outcomes (Schunk, 1991). A person can believe that practices and actions can produce outcomes (such as constant practice will lead to expert skill); however, if there is any doubt if adequate performance can be achieved by one's self then negative perception will influence their behavior (Bandura, 1977). Many researchers (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Gusky, 1998; Pajares, 1996) have conducted studies to examine teachers and their efficacy as it pertains to Bandura's work. According to Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk (1998), "The new strand theory grew from Bandura's work and identified teacher efficacy as a type of self-efficacy" (p. 203).

Undoubtedly, the confidence level of teachers can have a direct impact on their ability to develop and implement activities to achieve their desired learning outcome for their students/classroom. Overwhelmingly, focus group participants had a false sense of confidence in their ability. Participants' confidence level depended on several factors such as: preparation time leading up to activity, amount of time/frequency teachers see students, knowledge of activity and teacher's level of understanding, and students being pulled out of class with no time to follow up on the lesson the student missed. This is further supported by one participant stating:

I want to feel confident in my ability to implement them but there's so many variables when you're going to execute that make me feel less confident. For example if you planned learning activities especially with students that need the extra assistance whether there is a fire drill or they are being pulled for testing.

"I feel confident except that sometimes after I teach a lesson I realize that I really did not know what I was doing and I have to try something else to try and get through to the students."

I feel less confident working with special education. Unlike me, the inclusion/special education teacher has a special connection and a special relationship with them that me as the general education teacher cannot always achieve. So I feel that the fact that I cannot establish a special bond with the special education students negatively affects my relationship with these students.

In short, there are several factors that can affect a teacher's confidence level in working with students with special needs. The focus group participants discussed their lack of confidence in teaching students with special needs. Group participants cited their

inability to build rapport and unfamiliarity with certain subject areas as reasons for their lack of confidence. Teachers openly admitted that at times some students with special needs are sitting the whole class period with nothing to do because they find it difficult to balance their time and give each student adequate attention.

   Theme Four: Consideration for the push-in/pull-out model. To help students meet demanding standards within academic classes, each teacher must establish and maintain a learning environment that supports and motivates students to do their personal best (Danielson, 2013). There are strategies that teachers can implement to make focused and productive classrooms that help students with special needs achieve higher levels of learning. Research points to several co-teaching inclusion models that teachers could use to implement effective instruction for special needs students. Cook, Friend, and Penovich (1993 have presented several approaches to co-teaching that provide ways for two teachers to work together in a classroom. The five approaches to co-teaching consist of: one teach, one support; parallel teaching; push-in/pull-out; station teaching; and team teaching. With the one teach, one support model, one teacher has the primary responsibility for planning and teaching, while the other moves around the classroom helping individuals and observing particular behaviors. The parallel teaching model is when the two teachers plan jointly, but split the classroom to teach the same information at the same time. In push-in/pull-out, one teacher manages most of the class while the other teacher works with one student or a group of students inside or outside of the classroom. In the station teaching model, both teachers divide the instructional content, and each takes responsibility for planning and teaching part of it. And finally, in the team teaching model, both teachers are responsible for planning and they share the instruction

of the students. At the time of the study, CAPS was using the push-in/pull-out model. One teacher shared how to make better use of the push-in/pull-out model:

I did it but I was in the classroom in the morning and in the afternoons I was pull-out. And two periods in the morning also, like two days a week. I missed two periods in the morning. It was very hard on me I felt like I was wearing different hats. I didn't feel like I was really part of the classroom, not that the teacher made me feel that way but when it came to writing plans together and things I had this other obligation that I had to do and I had to find time do to that. So it made it very difficult, it felt like I had two separate jobs and that I didn't have enough time to do both so my suggestion is that if you're going to have an inclusion or co-teaching model that person should be there all day and not have any other responsibilities.

The push-in/pull-out model requires effective communication between teachers. Teachers must establish, use, and maintain effective communication systems so that they can all effectively contribute to the culture of learning. Participants shared their thoughts on how personality sometimes impact communication in a co-teaching environment:

It's stronger in the elementary end, but in the middle school it can be challenging at times because we're working with multiple teachers. However, I feel that the set-up we're doing for next year, I feel that it's going to be better because the Superintendent decreased the amount of teachers we're going to be collaborating with. So I think it's going to be easier, instead of having to meet with four teachers we're only meeting with two. But it's like what my friend here was saying before that if they put me in another room to do a little bit of help here,

maybe in fifth grade I'm seventh and eighth grade so maybe fifth grade if they want a little help here. It's hard for me to really build a rapport with that classroom because I'm not in there enough to build that rapport. I get it a little bit but not as much as I would like so things like that but I think it's going to be better next year.

I think it all depends on personalities too. The first year I did inclusion I didn't feel welcomed into the classroom. It was like that you should know what you want to do I'm not helping you, here's the book. The second year the cooperating person was very open saying 'I like your opinion on this, this is what I had in mind; what do you think?' so personalities definitely make or break effective communication.

Although teachers were well versed with the push-in/pull-out method of co-teaching, I wanted to provide them with other support mechanisms that could be useful in classroom instruction.

In order to assist teachers with skills and strategies on teaching in the inclusion classroom I conducted a professional development workshop designed especially to model how to do this in the classroom. Teachers were given four weeks to implement the techniques into the classroom from the professional development. I wanted to learn from participants if there was a particular instruction that improved their ability to support students with disabilities as well as the overall impact of this professional development. The exit interview revealed that teachers were able to incorporate several strategies into their classrooms that were successful.

It engaged the students more. I wrote that I use many boards in math class, and it

definitely for my students that just shut down, it engages them more, it decreases

frustration cause the paper/pencil, they get frustrated with that and it just gives

them time to be quicker in the classroom and to work more efficiently.

I've had success with it. For example with incorporating Spanish in the

classroom, it's not that they couldn't do it sometimes, but it's just too much. So

we discussed that, I said I'll just shorten it but still hit all the key areas. She saw a

big change in their score and they felt better about it. It took them the same

amount of time anyway. I did have one that I said if you finish early do some

work if you can and some did, so that is a success.

I added a lot more movement activities because they are active learners. Some of

the things I would assess like whether or not they could read quarter notes, or you

know move to eight notes without moving around, so that had to march to quarter

notes and then skip to eight notes instead, and across the board they were all able

to do that. So they know what the notes were, they were just showing me in a

different way.

Participant 8 talked about how those strategies positively impacted the classroom.

She stated:

I think my students were just as happy as I was to try out something new. The

only difference is the students didn't know I was implementing a new strategy. I

think they just noticed something different about my teaching style. Overall, we both were pleased.

Participant 9 shared:

Yes the professional development impacted my classroom in a good way. It taught me that it is not always about the special needs students completing everything. It is about modifying and making sure that they comprehend the main aspects of the lesson."

It is also important to note that teachers felt that there was a need to utilize the push-in/pull-out model. The following quotes captured the need for continued use of this model:

If it were possible I'd like to see the school still have a pull-out program for some students who are much lower than their grade level. I think that there needs to be pull-out as well as inclusion. And not just pull-out for subjects. I used to be the resource room teacher and they would come see me for Math, Reading, and Writing, everything up to like three of four periods a day. And some of the kids I think still need that, they are not benefitting from being in the classroom.

I agree, some of them I think it's just what they need. They need to be pulled out. They need to be in the classroom working with their peers and they are benefitting from it. However, there are still a lot of kids who are not benefiting from it. So what do we do with the kids that are not benefitting from it? They should be pulled out.

Teachers who work with students with special needs thrive on helping them access the general curriculum and accomplish the academic and social goals established by their Individualized Education Plan. Teachers bring various strengths to the classroom which includes: individualizing instruction, assessing progress on a continuing basis, applying knowledge of developmental readiness, using research-based strategies to teach basic reading, writing, and math skills, preparing youth for independence, and encouraging positive behavior. However, these skills are not permanent; they must be updated, enhanced, and expanded. For this reason, I conducted a professional development session for participants to provide research-based strategies to be implemented within the classroom.

Given that participants benefitted from the professional development, I felt it was important to learn of any ideas they may have about additional trainings that could be offered in the future. Several teachers shared their thoughts on offering more training for special area teachers:

> Yes, as a special area teacher, I've come up with my own strategies and my own ways to work with students that have special needs, whether it's behavioral or that need extra assistance. But to have a concrete plan or if there's a specific student that something you're doing in your class is working well, then that should be shared with the special area teachers. It might be that there are other strategies for Special Education that I'm just not aware of. That would be very helpful.

Participant 2 shared:

> I think a really good thing that would be beneficial in piggybacking, is that we can observe more co-teaching classrooms. I know I would benefit from just seeing a

good model and the Regular Ed teacher needs to see it too as well as the special area teachers need to see it. Just seeing two teachers, I don't care if it's another school and you know they are doing the exact, not exact but a great example of co-teaching, to be able to observe that would be better than just me reading a book about co-teaching. So that would be beneficial.

I think with some of the specials, they should be able to utilize us more, even if we are not in the special area classes with our students. I give them a list of who the kids are in the beginning of the year and what their accommodations are. But if they're really not sure how to do that I would offer my time to suggest how you might be able to modify something, so maybe give us some co-time. We're all on different schedules, that's the problem.

The special area teachers tend to get lost in the shuffle. That's some of the times when a co-teacher is most needed. Not in regards to the curriculum itself, but like when you're saying adding aides, things like that where I know a couple of special area teachers have come to me and said these two students work together, is this the best they can do? Help me out what can I do differently? They have come to me, but I would like to see that more because that's what I am here for. I'm here to help them and sometimes they do not ask for help."

Teachers in the study also spoke about the need for more collaboration between special area teachers and special education teachers.

Special areas we have our own PLC right now, but I think it's important to

collaborate with other PLCs. We've had Child Study Team come in this year and

kind of keep us up to date on some of the students. I think that it would be

beneficial maybe even once a month to meet with the special Ed teachers.

During a workshop, faculty meeting or something of that nature where we can all

sit down together and if they have any questions, or if I have any questions we

can work together to answer them. You know that kind of thing.

The exit interview included professional development and concluded with

participants sharing their thoughts on how my leadership fostered their development to

impact students with special needs. Participant 2 talked about how after participating in

the focus group and face-to-face interviews that she learned the importance of

collaboration when working with special needs students. She shared:

There is no strategy or technique that is 100% effective when working with

special needs students. Most students are on different levels so there is no way

that one technique will work for all students. However, you made me realize how

important collaboration is. It is so important to bounce ideas off my colleagues. I

thank you for shedding the light on this.

Summary of Cycle One Findings

According to Bolman and Deal (2008), acknowledging the perceptions of an

organization's members is crucial to executing change. The process used to collect

faculty and staff perceptions were opened-ended response questionnaires. The researcher

obtained important data from guidance counselors, special education teachers, and school

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administrators in reference to their questionnaires. The open-ended responses gave the special education teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators an opportunity to express their perception regarding the present process for instructing students with disabilities; how well they believed that their students were prepared during the academic school year; and how CAPS teachers could effectively assist students with disabilities in the classroom. This is one of the things I wanted to consider as we move into Cycle Two, one-to-one interviews. Some of my questions will lend itself to the struggle to achieve self-efficacy and pedagogical practices.

Cycle Two: One-to-One Interviews

The purpose of Cycle Two was to explore in greater detail teachers' perception of their efficacy based on the data gleaned from Cycle One. Therefore, I chose to conduct one-to-one interviews, which allowed me to examine in more detail the views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of special and general education teachers. Interviews allowed teachers to elaborate on their experiences with instructing students with special needs.

Interestingly, some of the teachers in the study did not originally go to school for education. Consequently, as a result they entered the classroom with little to no preparation of educating special needs students. One teacher noted: "I didn't go to school for education so I just kind of jumped right in so I'm learning a lot from the teachers around me and the kids. I kind of think I have a different perspective." This made interviewing teachers more important. I wanted to collect data that would assist in developing an intervention that would help these teachers. I chose to utilize semi-structured interviews because I did not want to test a specific hypothesis, but to discover

the rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of participants (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 87).

As the researcher, I contacted the participants via email to schedule an interview at CAPS. Before I began the interviews, the participants were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers and they could end the interview session at any time. Both general and special education teachers were notified that pseudonyms would be used and that their personal identity would not be revealed in this study. This was done to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Next, I gave myself one hour to interview and develop an appropriate rapport with each interviewee, a rapport that was based on formality as opposed to familiarity (Seidman, 1998). The interviews were held in the school's library. These were the themes that emerged from the interviews: (1) teacher preparation, (2) accommodations and modifications, and (3) establishing a culture of learning. The second theme also appeared in Cycle One.

Theme One: Teacher reflection on teacher preparation. Research indicates that teacher preparation, knowledge of teaching and learning, subject matter knowledge, experience, and the combined set of qualifications measured by teacher licensure are all leading factors in teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Research shows that teachers are in need of intensive training as related to inclusion of special education students in the regular education program (Buford & Casey, 2012). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Bargerhuff and Wheatley (2004), a group of teachers believed that their coursework had not included instruction on categories of disabilities, or on teaching students with disabilities. Throughout the study, I noticed that

there were some teachers who felt like their programs did not do a good job in preparing them to teach. They learned through experience and on the job training. Participants shared their concerns.

The whole idea of this first theme was to understand and help teachers to become better special education teachers. Teachers were really mixed on Theme 1 because some teachers said that their education programs helped them while others felt that it did not prepare them at all. The teachers' views were different in terms of what made them good special education teachers. There were some teachers that focused on job training while other teachers discussed that it was having a good mentor or a good cooperating teacher or just years of experience on the job that helped them to become better teachers.

One teacher shared how she had a hard time recalling what classes she took in her education program and how the classes she took failed to prepare for the classroom. She shared:

So the courses that I took were not specific to Special Education or anything like that. It was just like general teaching classes. I've kind of just done a lot of research and work on my own and figure things out as I went along and I had really good mentors along the way as well to help.

Participant 6 discussed how she has not implemented much of anything she learned from college and has learned far more from her student teacher experience than any of her coursework. She responded:

I don't implement too much from what I learned in college. I honestly learned a lot more from my cooperating teacher when I did my student teaching. I learned a lot from her, I was lucky that I had a good cooperating teacher. I also learned a lot

from the school district where I did my student teaching and the different titles there, the different offices there. So the Child Study Team stuff, I sat in on IEP meetings and those types of things when I did my student teaching even. So I learned a lot more by kind of doing, and hands-on and then finally when I got here, which was my first teaching experience here, so I learned a lot kind of just as I went along. I learned more from actually doing and the hands-on than I did from what I learned in college. I really don't remember too much from college that I actually could say honestly that I apply today.

Participant 4 shared how her teacher education program failed to prepare her for the day-to-day activities of a school specifically with issues related to special education students. She revealed:

I don't really remember, I mean they certainly didn't teach us anything about the laws and stuff relating to Special Ed students or IEPs. We did not really take any classes that told you how to manage a classroom, behavior management wise, budgeting time and lesson plans; well we did a lot of lesson planning but it's not like what we really do in real-life. Our lesson plans that we had to turn in like when we were doing our practicum or student teaching were seven pages long for one lesson which is pretty unrealistic when you get into the teaching field and see what it's really like. So they prepared us for some things but did not, in my opinion when I went to college, did not prepare us for the everyday, day-to-day activities of a school. You kind of got that from either substituting or student teaching you know or your practicum or something where you were in the building and actually living it.

Some of these teachers attended blended programs where they felt like their programs prepared them by helping them learn how to tap into their students' interests and familiarity with a range of information communication technology to encourage and facilitate an engaging learning environment, both virtually and physically. Participant 7 also shared her experiences with a blended program in college. She shared:

I took a blended program so I took like the education courses because my degree was in elementary education. And then they gave us six Special Ed courses such as assessment, differentiating instruction, technology things of that nature. So I took the General Ed courses, the six Special Ed courses that blended together as well as when I did my student teaching. They blended the student teaching together so I did it all in one semester. I did first like eleven weeks of General Ed teaching and then I switched roles and went into a self-contained room and did Special Ed so it was called the blended program at the time.

Another participant talked about how her college and graduate level education prepared her to deal with struggling students. She responded

Actually my major was Teacher of the Handicapped back when they called it that. I had my minor in reading and then I went back and got my Master's in reading because I thought most of my kids struggled in reading and now I'm highly qualified in middle school math as well. I tried to focus my education in areas that I saw my students had the most problems.

Participant 1 discussed how her teacher education program prepared her how to utilize differentiated instruction as an instructional strategy. She shared:

Yeah I do, like assessing data and like analyzing things like that. Writing the IEPs and the PLEPs and everything, that I learned there. The idea of differentiated instruction I learned through the college because they really embrace that. Some stuff though in the college I didn't need. I found it to be a waste and I also found that they made things harder than they needed to make a point. I guess if that makes sense over all though I did find that I use a lot of the information.

There were mixed reviews from teachers when asked if their college education prepared them for the classroom. Many teachers felt that the curriculum was merely a general overview of topics. There were very few courses that teachers took that helped them prepare for life in the trenches. Most of what teachers learned was in the day-to-day relations between students, administration, teachers, and parents.

Theme Two: Accommodations and modifications. The second theme was accommodations and modifications through IEP. Special Education is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) as "Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet unique needs for a child with a disability." Special Education includes direct educational instruction by a special education teacher, language therapy, physical therapy, which is a part of a landmark federal legislation now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

This act ensures that services and placements needed by students with a disability are granted. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is essential to the success of students with special needs. Each student with special needs at CAPS is given personalized academic goals. Teachers are required to incorporate the special needs

student's specific academic goals on their IEP. Teachers shared how they implement student modifications and accommodations stated on the IEPs:

> We are always modifying, changing, and supporting. Some of the modifications with my Special Ed kids may be using pictures to help with directions. And we have a picture program, but again I use some of that with my regular kids who need a little bit more time. Some modifications may be to use fewer words with my directions, and again I may do that for everyone as well.

> I do not do a lot of traditional testing so when their IEP modifications are specifically about more time on tests or testing in a different room that kind of stuff does not really apply to us. But the modifications about extra time when they need it or fewer questions are all applied.

Under the second theme of accommodations and modifications what I sought initially was the connection to the family atmosphere in the school, I can see them working together, which is evident in the family atmosphere as I discussed in Cycle One. One of the things I found is that these teachers were really interested in modifying and accommodating so that student could be successful.

The first theme I saw under modifications and accommodations was the realization of a school atmosphere as I mentioned in Theme One. Even through accommodations and modifications, teachers were sharing and talking to each other about students. Also, these personal interviews allowed me to get deeper into the demographics and infrastructure of CAPS to promote student success. Typically, that is what it is supposed to be, however, teachers do not always talk about accommodations and

modifications; they normally are doing it just to do it. In the language of these teachers, I really saw evidence. They wanted to support the students and did not want to make the work too hard. They also wanted to set goals that could make the students successful. Based on the data of Cycle One and Two, I wanted to develop interventions that would help teachers. Instead of focusing on nine strategies, my main goal was to focus on three strategies. The main strategies were engaged learning styles, differentiated instruction, and accommodations and modifications through IEP.

Although I noticed that teachers were excited to modify and accommodate work to improve student success, all of them were not familiar with using the IEP process. So as the researcher, I wanted to discuss how to use more of the IEP and what the IEP is for. Then I wanted to talk about how to better engage students. The teachers were very interested in seeing student success, but I wanted them to develop more strategies for being able to engage this new population of special needs students.

Teachers shared their experiences of being able to choose the modifications for their students that allowed them to get creative with the modifications they chose because they knew their students so well. They shared:

> We get to choose what the modifications are, so I get to pick. Back when I did seventh grade modifications I could say what I wanted done, so less problems, I would actually write in there what needed to be done and then we would implement it. So they are still doing the actual lesson, but its fewer choices. You can be creative with your modifications. I am at least.

I definitely go to child study team or I may go to a teacher that had them last year. We are pretty open here in terms of sharing. We kind of know who we can trust and we have a trusting little community where if I am really struggling with a student they will help me. PLCs are also good because we can talk about the struggling student and put our heads together to see what we can do for that student.

I read their IEP plan. If they don't have one then I go to the homeroom teacher or any staff member that is assisting that student, check in with them on their history, try to get a feel for their background and what they are being provided at that time. Because a student who might be struggling in another subject may be very welcoming in art because that's something that is comfortable to them and vice versa. If a student is struggling across the board I try to reach out to the Child Study Team or the psychologist to kind of step in and give me some tools to use.

Teachers used accommodations and modifications through the IEP to provide different ways for students to take in information or communicate their knowledge back to them. The changes incorporated did not alter or lower the standards or expectations for a subject or test. Through the student's IEP, classroom accommodations were formally developed. In addition, some general education teachers agreed informally to make accommodations for kids in their classes. All of the teachers implemented accommodations to make sure students have equal access to curriculum and a way to be successful.

Theme Three: Fostering a culture of learning. Learning is a culture. A culture of learning is a "collection of thinking habits, beliefs about self and collaborative workflows that result in sustained critical learning" (Heick, 2013, p. 1). Establishing a classroom culture is one of the most important duties of a teacher. Establishing a culture of learning can ignite appreciation for knowledge and motivate students to participate in classroom learning activities. Being that CAPS was a school choice district, many of their students were from out of the district and lived in neighboring towns. Some of these out of district students come with various problems that were behavioral, academic, and social. As a result, CAPS had an increased Special Education population.

When I looked at these individual interviews, the teachers were really working to accommodate and establish a culture of learning for special needs students. Teachers shared how they address the needs of these students that enrolled in the school from out of the district.

> We've had lots of kids come into the building whether they are from surrounding districts or whether they are from here, they come with baggage. They come with psychological problems, home problems; they come with a learning issues, and behavior problems. We treat them the way we treat the rest of our kids. We deal with them the best we can. We use the resources from around the classroom. We are gonna meet you where you are mentally, emotionally, as well as academically and then take it from there and 8help them grow.

> In group work we see a lot of social development issues when you try to put them in a group and have them perform together. I try to address it in a way that's very

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non-specific. For example, if I have a kid with performance anxiety I'm never gonna call them out, I'm never gonna say try this by yourself and it'll be great. It's a lot of trying to pair kids with who they are comfortable with and making it a safe place because it needs to feel safe. It needs to feel safe in order for them to be willing to even try half of what we are gonna do in music class.

Participant 8 discussed how all of the teachers work together to address the needs of the students that come from outside of the district. She shared:

Well you know we've had lots of kids come into the building whether they're from surrounding districts or whether they're from Community, they come with baggage everybody comes with something. They come with psychological problems, home problems, they come with learning issues, behavior problems. We treat them the way we treat the rest of the kids, Community students or not-Community students we deal with them the best we can. We use the resources from around the classroom. I've used the school nurse several times, I have this year. Every year we use the school nurse, we keep in close contact with the parents. Every day the teacher sends home notes, parents sign, send it back so we have that ongoing process. I work closely with the Child Study Team, the school psychologist, the social worker if we need her. We even have a bullying specialist, so if there's kids they're are just not dealing with outside recess issues, we have somebody in on that. So the kids really do get a lot here, not just what we in the classroom could offer them, and we do, we understand that we're all not on the same level. We understand that, we're gonna to meet you where you are, we're

gonna try to meet you where you are mentally and emotionally as well as academically, and then take it from there and grow from there.

Participant 9 discussed how the school has such a welcoming environment and although students may come from outside of the district they do not feel like outsiders. She stated:

I have found that this school is very accepting and I don't know if it's because of the class size that they are that welcoming. Because we have so many eyes on situations that students have learned to react to somebody new coming in from an outside area, they accept them quickly. And again I've been here for two years but I've seen kind of a rotation of students. Last year we got a new girl for instance and this year she was crying her eyes out when she left because she'd been accepted so much and she already had a group so quickly that she didn't want to leave our school. So it's a very welcoming community. As far as cultural differences, the students, again I don't see any challenges as far as that goes, there's no separation that I have seen amongst the students.

Participant 6 discussed the importance of building rapport with students in order to promote social, emotional, and academic growth. She stated:

I feel like you can't make the kid do the work, however, you can try to make them enjoy coming to school. So from day one, I'm trying to build that rapport with them. I had these kids last year in sixth grade and they moved up with me to seventh. Last year one student in particular did not like me; it took a little bit to build rapport. Now the student's emailing me when they have questions about homework assignments or when they need something so we have a good email

system going on. If they ask me can we talk I will pull them out and talk to them one-on-one.

Participant 3 discussed how she promotes academic growth for her students by setting IEP goals that can be accomplished within a school year. She stated:

I choose goals that I feel could be accomplished in the year. Sometimes I may not know an individual student so well, but when I have had a student for a couple of years and I know them really well, in some respects those goals mean nothing to me because I am gonna take this kid and push him as hard and as far as I can."

Participants were asked if they felt the techniques they implemented in the classroom were effective. Participants 2 discussed how one of the techniques she implemented keeps the students engaged. She stated:

Even during large group time when they might be sitting and listening and attentive, we kind of flip flop and tell them to get up and move around and then let's sit down and play some sort of game together. I try to keep them interested that way too.

Participant 3 spoke about the students who need extra help and how their parents may not necessarily agree that they need the extra help. She discussed:

Most of my students are Special Ed, a couple of them are students that are not doing well and their parents do not really want them classified. However, we feel as though they need this help and the parents have agreed to have them pulled. They asked to have them get this help.

I definitely think this age group likes that exploration; not necessarily need dictating, like 'This is what we're doing and this is how it works.' I try to give them whatever it is that we're working with and I'll ask 'what do you think it's for?' or 'how do you think it works?' There is a balance; certain things do have to be taught directly. But when I can flip flop and let them get their hands dirty, they are interested. So if they have to sit and attend to 'This is A' and then, you know, they are just as interested because they know they're not always…. I don't do worksheets and things like that. And by doing those types of activities where they are hands on or they are exploring, I am able to get your higher-level thinkers and kind of push them and encourage them to think to the next level. Or the kids that are more, not even delayed, developmentally, they're just not as, they're not there yet, they're where they are, they're also exploring and kind of getting to their own next level. Again, it's such a wide range of development.

One teacher shared how teachers rally together to help each other if they are struggling with a student. She replied:

What kind of support at home is there, before I call home? I definitely feel, as far as the needs of the kids, Special Ed or not, there's a nice culture of teachers that, they're willing, people are willing to help each other and you don't necessarily feel bad if you're struggling with (inaudible) yea, helping somebody in your classroom because you know that you can go, there's other places. I mean, we're sitting in a room full of resources for teachers.

Participant 7 talked about how she works hard in the beginning of the school year to build rapport with her students so that they enjoy coming to school. Establishing a

culture for learning is very important to all teachers. All of the teachers believed that it is their responsibility to create an atmosphere and energy level in the classroom where students are engaged in classroom work. When the teacher expresses enthusiasm for the subject, by showing students that they are learning a particular topic or skill because it is important, interesting, and fun as opposed to learning something because it is required or will be on a test, students are more invested in their learning. As a result of establishing a strong culture of learning, students respond by taking pride in their work and gain a sense of accomplishment that comes from having achieved major goals.

Cycle Three: Implementing Support Mechanisms with Teachers

The purpose of Cycle Three was to help build teacher efficacy by the implementation of a professional development. Based on the data from Cycle One and Cycle Two, I determined that there were areas that I saw that could help teachers improve teacher efficacy. I had a professional development session with teachers where I introduced nine strategies that could enhance their pedagogical practices and thereby improve teacher efficacy. Teachers were then asked to select two strategies to implement in their classrooms, because I wanted to be true to the action research design where the desires of the environment were reflected with exclusive intention of making a difference (Glesne, 2006),

I analyzed some of the themes from Cycle One and Cycle Two and found embedded questions pertaining to strategies that could help teachers be self-efficacious. I combed back through the data and developed several strategies related to teacher efficacy. In Cycle Three, the nine support strategies were: Accommodating Strategies, Learning Styles, Effective Instructional Practices, Instructional Interventions, Engaged

Learning Styles, Classroom Management, Behavior Instructions, Teacher Support and Response to Intervention, and Teacher Support Strategies.

Implementing instructional and intervention strategies. Instructional and intervention strategies have become an important way for teachers who work with special needs students to ensure that they succeed in the classroom environment. (Guralnick & Conlon, 2007). Helping students with special needs who are struggling within the classroom requires teachers to choose an appropriate time and strategy for the intervention. Without a systematic approach, this can be a challenge for teachers who have multiple students in need of help.

Accommodating strategies. In looking at the themes in Cycle One and Two, it was apparent that all of the teachers wanted to explore accommodating strategies. Based on the data, one of the first strategies I developed was Accommodations and Modifications strategy. Accommodations and modifications are very important when teaching students with special needs. For many students with special needs, the key to success in the classroom lies in having appropriate accommodations and modifications made to the instruction and other classroom activities (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). Each student may need different personalized accommodations that will help him or her to be more successful. Accommodations and modifications need to be individualized for students, based upon their needs and their personal learning styles and interests.

Participant 6 shared her experience with implementing modifications within the classroom:

The Spanish teacher gave me the test she was giving the class. She had 3 versions, but the lowest tiered needed more "chunking" for my 3 weakest students. This test

was a review of the Spanish pronouns we had been studying. The first section was matching. She had 12 terms. I broke these into two sections, with 6 in each section. I also highlighted key terms in the directions of each of the other sub tests.

Participant 7 shared her experience with the modification strategy that she implemented:

I use is to reduce the amount of problems or choices given to students. Eliminating a choice helps the child become less over whelmed and gives them a better chance to get the multiple choice problem correct. However, not all assessments are multiple choice, so I try and pick questions that are relating to the common core but are easier for students with special needs to do so that they are successful. I have 7th grade students on 3rd and 4th grade levels in math or/and language arts so using this strategy helps decrease frustration and makes the child feel success. Sometimes I have to make 2 or 3 different modified assessments because I have a broad range of learning needs, and I do not want to make an assessment too easy for a student that can do more.

As the number of students with special needs has increased immensely within the district, teachers have yearned for the opportunity to gain a better understanding and utilization of academic and technological strategies for accommodation. There are many things teachers can do while planning a lesson to make it more accessible to all students, including those with learning disabilities. Therefore, another area that I felt would be beneficial to my study was learning accommodations.

Quite simply, learning accommodations are changes in how students salvage information and display their learning abilities. Changes or adjustments made to classroom teaching guarantee students equal accessibility to the curriculum and every opportunity to be successful (IDEA, 2004). An accommodation can be considered something as minimal as reducing the number of items or problems on a student's worksheet (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Another accommodation can be the use of graphic representations to illustrate written directions (ADA, 1990). Learning accommodations and individual learning go hand-in-hand. Individual learning styles depend on cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors, as well as one's prior experience. It is important for teachers to understand the differences in their students' learning styles, so that they can implement learning accommodations into their daily activities, curriculum, and assessments.

Learning styles. Learning styles are ways in which a student learns. Styles are varied and results are dependent on the individual student (Banks & Banks, 2007). Learning styles involve students in discussions and group collaborations (Delpit, 2006). Learning styles can also involve manipulatives, role-playing, games, and simulations to develop conceptual understanding (Gay, 2000). When instruction and/or interventions reflect the various learning styles in which students learn, success of all students can be achieved. When teachers have a better understanding of their students' learning styles they are able to provide effective instruction within the classroom. The participants felt that they needed more guidance on how they can improve their teaching and learning. Effective instructional practices are the key to achieving desired student outcomes for students with special needs.

Effective instructional practices. Effective instructional practices are practices that research has shown to improve teaching and learning. These practices showcase the power that individual teachers possess to improve learning results. Effective instructional practices use simulations to model real-life experiences. Effective instructional practices use much of the ideologies of culturally responsive teaching: a pedagogical approach that encourages students' cultural views, cultural experiences, as well as their strengths, and how to embrace their cultural diversity by accessing this method of teaching (Gollnick & Chin, 2002). Effective instructional practices and research-based interventions are used prior to determining eligibility for special education and related services. These effective practices and interventions must be designed to address the skill deficiency of each individual student.

Instructional interventions. Instructional Interventions are scientific based strategies that will help to diversify instruction to meet the unique learning needs of students (Kommer, 2006). It incorporates concepts found in differentiated instruction, by which instructional interventions encompass the development of new and innovative teaching methods by responding to, and benefiting the needs of both general and special education students (Reeves, 2006). When incorporating instructional interventions within the classroom, teachers must seek information about different types of cognitive learning styles and what activities best engage different types of learners. This will allow teachers to shift the focus of their teaching strategies to help students become actively engaged in their own learning process rather than waiting for teachers to feed information to them.

Engaged learning styles. Engaged learning styles give teachers tools to help students with a variety of learning styles by introducing different methods of being taught. Engaged learning styles introduce ways of learning for the visual learner; for the social and solitary learner; verbal and music and/or auditory learner; and, for the combination, logical and/or mathematical; as well as, the physical and kinesthetic learner. Research suggests that student engagement promotes academic success (Mintz, 2007). Not only has research shown the promotion of student academic success through engaged learning styles, it also captures the attention and maintains active participation of students. Another theme that materialized from the research was teachers' ability to effectively manage classroom procedures and student behavior.

Managing Classroom Procedures and Student Behavior

Classroom management involves actions such as monitoring student behavior and reinforcing positive behavior to establish order, engage students, or elicit their cooperation. Routines and procedures are the solution to a well-managed organized classroom. Research shows that most behavior problems result from lack of classroom routines and procedures (Wagner et al., 2006). When classroom procedures are put into place, the number of interruptions to academic instruction are reduced, and the class flows more smoothly. The two support mechanisms that I introduced for managing classroom procedures and student behaviors were classroom management and behavior interventions.

Classroom management. Distractions in the classroom can be avoided by instructional practices that support and engage the interest of the student. Encouraging students by providing instructions in a precise way and always initiating respectful

gestures of encouragement during instruction gains the desired results for the management of the classroom, while clear and concise instructions provide the structure students need to fulfill the assignment given. The impact of managing cultural diversity, new methods of instruction and sensitive issues concerning cultural behavior, and practices by management can only succeed when educators are versed and educated themselves in these areas (Armstrong, 1991; Banks, 1999). Implementing behavior interventions is a valuable way to improve classroom management. Both classroom management and behavior interventions promote positive outcomes for students.

Behavior interventions. Education enriches the lives of students and their future. Implementing behavioral interventions such as teaching students to identify emotions and teaching replacement behaviors helps students who have various behavioral challenges. It also provides a support that aides in improving student behavior that will lead to the success of the student. With diverse students comes varied behavior that requires new strategies aimed at helping students to learn and create an environment, which promotes learning and encourages success for teachers and students.

Once teachers are ready to create a behavior intervention plan, they should start by assembling a team who can brainstorm possible interventions and then talk about the interventions on the list and weed out the interventions they feel may be unsuccessful. Team members should discuss the appropriateness of interventions on the list in terms of how they relate to the problem and how easy they would be to use within typical routines within the classrooms. This discussion will allow team members to select the most appropriate interventions. Next the team needs to identify the type of supports teachers will need in order to implement the selected interventions. The selected interventions and

support for teachers and the student should be documented in the plan. For this reason teacher support strategies are very important for successfully implementing behavior interventions.

Teacher Support Strategies

Teacher support strategies are methods used to help in supporting teachers with being effective, efficient educators in any environment. Examples of teacher support strategies are Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response To Intervention (RTI). Professional Learning Communities (PLC) is a group of educators (teachers, administrators, consultants, supports staff, and/or parents) who focus their work on the formal study of instructional practices in order to improve their students' learning abilities (Hord, 1997). According to Walker (2012), professional learning communities originated in the business sector with the belief that organizations can learn.

In the education sector, the PLC provides a pathway to a learning organization: one which comprises a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003, p. 132). It is essential to implement both teacher support strategies such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response to Intervention (RTI) because these complementary processes are considered research-based best practices to improve student learning.

Professional learning communities. Above all, implementing a Professional Learning Community (PLC) at CAPS will allow teachers to collaborate with members in reference to a specific area of concern. A PLC is a group of teachers who meet regularly as a team to identify essential and valued student learning, set academic achievement

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goals, create lessons to improve upon those levels and share strategies and ideas to achieve student success (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005). The purpose for a PLC is to produce desired change in your school. Students and parents will truly benefit from leaders who consider all members of the community when making decisions, challenge everyone to reflect, learn, and seek out decisions based on data. I also learned that having a vision makes feedback more realistic and focused. If everyone contributes to the vision collectively, then allegiance is less of a challenge.

One of the major topics of discussion in education today is the possibilities and implementation of professional learning communities. Great deals of public schools are in the process of developing into professional learning communities with the optimism that student education will progress. As adults make a visible commitment to discussing the issues about teaching and learning styles, taking actions will advance students' academic attainments.

Response to intervention. Response to Intervention is an approach to the diagnosis of learning disabilities. It also decreases the amount of special education referrals. A student with academic delays is given one or more research-based, validated interventions. The student's academic progress is monitored frequently to see if those interventions are sufficient to help the student to catch up with his or her peers. If the student fails to show significantly improved academic skills, despite several well-designed and implemented interventions, this failure to respond to intervention can be viewed as evidence of an underlying learning disability. A few techniques to interventions are as follows:

Recognize the academic skill gap between the student and their peers

Determine the reason for the low academic performance

Select a scientifically-based intervention likely to improve the students' academic functioning

Monitor academic progress frequently to evaluate the impact of the intervention

If the student fails to respond to several well-implemented interventions, consider a referral to Special Education

Teachers shared their experiences with implementing instructional and intervention strategies within the classroom. Participant 8 discussed what techniques she uses when students are not meeting the learning objectives. She shared:

How do I know that kids got it for instance? Well sometimes they don't and in which case then we do pull-aside or re-teaching. I might give them another hands-on where I can get manipulatives out, graphic organizers to re-teach, there's a lot of re-teaching that goes on, one-on-one classes and then if they still don't get it we send samples home for parents to see, maybe the parent can work with them at home. So we have to kind of move on at a certain point, but there's a lot of re-teaching going on.

Participant 4 talked about a student who is several levels below his grade level and how the techniques used with him cause him to show a disinterest towards school. She shared:

We have one child who is very, very low not anywhere near the fifth grade level in reading, writing or math. So everything we do has to be watered down to his level but still present a challenge to him and still try to keep his interest. He's very

turned off of school, he's very frustrated, he's very low, and so in that case it's

not the ideal situation for him.

Participant 2 shared how she engages in modeling and role-playing to support

emotional and social growth with her students. She stated:

If there is someone that needs more social or emotional support I may do more

modeling and role-playing of behavior than the previous year. So I may take more

time doing those kinds of things in group or small group or we are actually

working on social skills directly. Or I may be in the center while they are playing

independently and just playing side by side or with, so I can be that support and

model when they are talking to another student."

Participants 2 discussed how one of the techniques she implemented keeps the

students engaged. She stated:

Even during large group time when they might be sitting and listening and

attentive, we kind of flip flop and tell them to get up and move around and then

let's sit down and play some sort of game together. I try to keep them interested

that way too.

Participant 7 talked about how she focuses on whether the student is learning the

lesson instead of focusing on other factors such as sloppy handwriting. She stated:

Through the assessment that the teacher normally gives I determine the important

parts of the lesson and I ask myself does it matter if the kid has sloppy

handwriting? Handwriting doesn't matter to me. What matters is if the student is

doing what the teacher is asking of them. We don't always have time to co-plan

so I try not to nit-pick too much when it comes to my special-needs students.

Field Notes

In Cycle Three, I conducted a professional development session for the nine participants in which we discussed support strategies that will aid and support lower level learners and students with special needs. As the facilitator of the professional development, my duties were to discuss the support strategies and elaborate in great detail of how I came up with the themes. I started my professional development session by thanking everyone for their time and participation in this training. I was glad that everyone was on time so that I could get started on time. I wanted to make sure everyone truly understood how important their participation was to me.

At the start of the session everyone was attentive and eager to learn of the mechanisms I was introducing. I introduced nine support mechanisms to participants and gave them an in-depth overview of each of them. Participants were told that they had to pick two of the nine support mechanisms introduced to implement in their classrooms for eight weeks. Participants were engaged in the professional development and excited to learn of new strategies that they would be implementing in their classrooms.

Participants collaborated with each other to discuss what strategies would be the best fit for their classrooms. All participants were open and willing to try new strategies in the classroom. A few of the participants were hesitant to try something new in fear of the support mechanisms not working. Participants overall were thankful for the opportunity to be a part of the professional development activities. One participant asked me if I had any suggestions for introducing new support mechanisms within my lessons. I assured participants that since this would be their first time implementing these mechanisms within their classroom there is no right or wrong way to do so.

Participants talked about sharing these support mechanisms with other colleagues in their Professional Learning Communities. They were excited to be a part of professional development that will ultimately allow them to train other teachers in the district. I gave my contact information to each participant and encouraged them to contact me at any time if they had any questions. I told them that I would be contacting them around the four-week mark to get an update of their progress of implementing the strategies within the classroom.

Field Notes-Teacher Interventions

For Cycle Three, participants were to select two strategies and were asked to keep a journal detailing their experiences. The secondary source of data for Cycle Three was analyzing their journal entries. I reached out to participants at week four to get an update on their progress. I called each participant separately and left messages to let them know to call me back at their convenience. Out of the nine participants only three participants responded to my message and called back. I reached out to the other six participants two more times by both phone and e-mail but to no avail.

I was frustrated that only three of the participants responded to me; especially when I told all of them at the end of the professional development session that I would be contacting them at week four. It seems as if they did not find the week four check in to be important. However, I did manage to have a conversation with three of the nine participants. All three participants let me know that they had implemented the two support mechanisms they chose.

I also gave participants an assignment, which was to do a write-up discussing the nine support strategies and the two strategies they chose. I wanted participants to provide

me with an update of how things were going in the classroom. Only five of the nine participants completed the assignment. I am thinking that because I asked them to do this at the end of March, they were already burned out from state testing and did not want the added responsibility. I just hoped that they would understand how important this assignment was to my research project. However, I was still able to analyze the feedback I received from the other five participants. The feedback I received from the participants that turned in their assignments was favorable. All five participants were able to implement both strategies they selected.

Teacher assessment of engaged learning. Of the nine participants, five completed the self-reflection teacher assessment. Teacher/participants were given intervention strategies and were instructed to select two to implement in their classroom instruction. Following the implementation, teacher/paricipants were asked to write a one page reflection on how they thought they performed using the two new strategies. Because there are many applied strategies that are effective in the classroom, it is up to the classroom and special education teacher to ensure that proper strategies are being used in the classroom to assist individual learning styles and provide success to all students with special needs. Utilizing a student's learning style and IEP indicators to create alternative learning instruction that addresses the learning needs of special education students is imperative to helping students with special needs learn (Salend, 2011).

All of the participants that turned in a letter chose to implement an engaged learning strategy within their classroom. Participant 3 stated:

I chose to use the Engaged Learning Strategy. My class is a co-teaching room and the majority of students are either classified special education students or basic skills. Writing and reading is difficult for them. They love singing and dancing. I had the students sing familiar tunes using their trick words. We sometimes add motions. All of the songs are found on the Internet. I think this strategy is very effective, but I have difficulty remembering the songs, the students do not.

Participant 7 shared her experience of using white boards as an engaged learning strategy. This strategy works extremely well with students with special needs. This allows all students to respond and receive instant feedback about whether they understand the concept. The teacher can then adjust the instruction as necessary. She shared:

One engaged learning strategy I use in the classroom are the small white boards. I have enough for all of my students; however, not all of the students need one, so they do not ask for one. My students', who struggle, become frustrated, shut down, or simply have sloppy handwriting use the white boards and love it. It motivates them to try more problems and decreases frustration.

Another teacher discussed how she used a chalkboard easel to support struggling students in learning. She stated:

To support struggling students in learning to identify and write the letters in their name, I used a chalkboard easel. I wrote the student's name in chalk. The student traced over the letters with a small piece of sponge or a paint brush dipped in water. Then the student traced the water marks with chalk. I implemented this strategy with these three students because they were having more difficulty with their name compared to the rest of the class. I believe this strategy helped these

students because it was fun and exciting for them. The easel work allowed for the students to use different muscles while working on a vertical surface versus a horizontal surface. The students were also able to practice the letters in a novel way using a multisensory approach. Using chalk on a chalk board also gave the student proprioceptive feedback.

Differentiated instruction. Students with special needs often struggle in the classroom. By providing them with differentiated classroom instruction and modified curriculum, teachers and can provide an educational experience that is both equitable and accessible for students struggling to learn. Differentiated instruction is a popular strategy in working with students with special needs (Hobgood & Ormsby, 2011).

One teacher wrote about how implementing differentiated instruction within the classroom was effective. Participant 3 shared:

The second strategy I implemented was differentiated instruction. Concepts that are being taught are introduced in several different ways so all students can feel success. Usually one method I use to teach is differentiated instruction. I tried to make the lesson more interactive for those students that have difficulty focusing during direct instruction. The students were put in groups of three. Each group had to work together to find the correct spelling of words that had the r-controlled vowels ir, er, and ur. Some students manipulated pieces to spell words, some recorded the answers and some read the words. I am not so sure if this was differentiated instruction or engaged learning again. I used a timer to ensure students stayed on task. I feel it was effective because all students were exposed

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to the different spellings of words with the r-controlled vowels and could read them.

Participant 9 shared how she implemented differentiated instruction within her small group reading and language arts pull out. She stated:

I specifically chose to use this strategy within my small group reading and language arts pull out. Even though this pull out is already small group and therefore the students' abilities would assumed to be relatively similar, they are not. These students are not on the same ability levels so differentiated instruction is a strategy I have been using for a large majority of the year and it has been working quite well. Being able to take the main topic/goal for the day and tailor instruction for each student's specific needs and ability level has met some extra work for me, but more importantly it has led to student success. Within this small group I have been trying to promote and build the students' self-esteem and self-confidence, I believe that experiencing success in their academic endeavors can really be boost for students so this differentiated approach has really been a great method. Being able to see each student work independently without becoming frustrated or shut down has been fantastic.

Participant 6 shared how she differentiated instruction for her special education students in her 8th grade inclusion science class and how this strategy successfully helped the special education students in her class. She discussed:

All students in the 8th grade inclusion Science class are expected to type up lab reports for the labs completed with partners in class. Earlier in the year, students worked with their partner and shared the sections to be completed, then compiled

their work for a final grade. This final trimester, students are required to type the entire lab by themselves. Since my 5 IEP students work/type slowly and do not have strong copying skills, I made a lab template for them. Each lab I fill in all the basic sub headings, as well as type out the questions to be answered at the conclusion of the lab. I put this template in their "works/documents" folder so they can concentrate their time and effort with answering the sub skill sections and the questions. The lab templates have been very effective for the most part. My students have had to complete 4 labs thus far this trimester. Two out of the 3 students that use these have earned "Cs" or better on their labs, and have gotten them turned in on a timely manner. One student still owes 2 out of the 4 labs, even given this accommodation.

Cycle Four: Impact on Teacher Efficacy

At the end of the entire project, which happened in Cycle Four, I met with all the participants as a whole to explain my study and answer any questions that the participants may have. I then posed three open-ended questions in regards to Teacher efficacy, differentiated instruction, and pedagogical practices to generate discussion. I stated that participants did not have to put their name on the questionnaire, just their participant number because I wanted to protect the identity of the participants.

After the exit interview, I distributed the Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale. In this action research design, the researcher's ultimate goal is to implement effective change. As the researcher, I wanted to meet with each participant to discuss my finding and to make relevant recommendations. The purpose of the exit interview was to further triangulate my data and inform future researchers in Chapter 5.

Post Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale

The Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale was also used as a post-test to determine the impact of the study on participants. To determine if any significant difference existed between pre- and post-survey questions for each teacher, data were first subjected to a Shapiro–Wilk's test for normality to determine if the data satisfied the assumption of a paired t-test. If data were normally distributed, a paired t-test was implemented to assess if any significant difference existed between pre- and post-survey results. However, if data were found to not be normally distributed, data were subjected to the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test.

In order to determine if the professional development session and my leadership was effective, I analyzed the data from the responses of the Pre- and Post-Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale. Table 2 highlights the analysis of teachers' level of efficacy when working with students. The table shows that when data were compared, teachers were more confident in their abilities by the end of my leadership than before the professional development activities first began.

I noticed an increase in the mean response of the question: "How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?" from 3.67 to 5.89 in the pre-Bandura survey. The mean response to the question "How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?" increased from 6.11 to 8.22 on the post survey. There was a 2.55 increase in the mean response to the question "How much can you do to get children to do their homework?" This changed from 3.67 to 5.22. There was a sizeable to change to the question "How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?" The mean response from the post survey in regards to this question was 8.33, which is a

change of 3.44. The mean response of the question "How much can you do to get children to do their homework?" increased to 6.56 from 4.78. The mean response of the question "How much can you do to help other teachers with their teaching skills increased from 5.56 to 7.11.

      After my professional development, the teachers' efficacy levels increased for every question on the Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale. Teachers were more confident in their abilities to influence the decisions that were made in the school. Teachers were more confident in their abilities to get the instructional materials and equipment they needed. Also, after implementing the support strategies, teachers were more confident in their abilities to get through to the most difficult students as well as helping students believe that they can do well in schoolwork.

Table 2

Mean Pre- and Post-Survey Responses to Each Question

Question	Pre-Survey Mean Response	Post-Survey Mean Response
How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?	3.67	5.89
How much can you express your views freely on important school matters?	5.11	6.33
How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need?	6.44	8.00
How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school?	2.22	3.78

Table 2 (continued)

Question	Pre-Survey Mean Response	Post-Survey Mean Response
How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	5.78	6.89
How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home?	4.78	6.11
How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?	5.89	7.11
How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons?	4.78	6.56
How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?	5.56	6.22
How much can you do to get students to work together?	6.44	7.67
How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?	4.44	5.44
How much can you do to get children to do their homework?	3.67	6.22
How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	6.56	7.11
How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	6.33	7.22
How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on the school grounds?	5.89	6.33
How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities?	4.22	5.89
How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school?	4.78	6.00

Table 2 (continued)

Question	Pre-Survey Mean Response	Post-Survey Mean Response
How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school?	6.00	7.00
How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools?	4.56	5.89
How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school?	3.67	5.00
How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school?	3.78	5.33
How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school?	3.44	5.33
How much can you do to make the school a safe place?	6.89	7.56
How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?	6.89	8.33
How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?	6.11	8.22
How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills?	5.56	7.11
How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to the make the school run effectively?	5.56	6.78
How much can you do to reduce school dropout?	3.78	5.89
How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism	3.67	5.11
How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	6.33	7.67

Results Associated with Normally Distributed Data

      Data associated with questions 1 (W=0.91, p=0.09), 2 (W=0.93, p=0.23), 5

(W=0.92, p=0.13), 11 (W=0.90, p=0.06), 15 (W=0.92, p=0.12), 16 (W=0.96, p=0.52), 17

(W=0.93, p=0.18), 19 (W=0.94, p=0.23), 20 (W=0.96, p=0.64), 21 (W=0.93, p=0.20), 26

(W=0.93, p=0.23), 27 (0.93, p=0.21), 28 (W=0.96, p=0.65), and 29 (W=0.92, p=0.11)

were found to be normally distributed with the use of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality

(Table 3).

Table 3

Pre- and Post-Survey Data from the Paired T-Test
(Normally Distributed Data)

Question	Test Statistic	df	P-Value
1. How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?	3.48	7	0.01
2. How much can you express your views freely on important school matters?	0.68	7	0.52
5. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	1.43	7	0.19
11. How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?	1.76	7	0.12
15. How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on the school grounds?	1.16	7	0.28
16. How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities?	3.97	7	0.005
17. How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school?	2.76	7	0.03

Table 3 (continued)

Question	Test Statistic	*df*	P-Value
19. How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools?	2.45	7	0.04
20. How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school?	1.22	7	0.26
21. How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school?	2.14	7	0.07
26. How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills?	2.48	7	0.04
27. How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to the make the school run effectively?	2.63	7	0.04
28. How much can you do to reduce school dropout?	4.24	7	0.003
29. How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism?	3.25	7	0.01

When subjected to a paired t-test, results illustrate that teachers pre- and post-survey responses significantly differed for questions 1 (p=0.01), 16 (p=0.005), 17 (p=0.03), 19 (p=0.04), 26 (p=0.04), 27 (p=0.04), 28 (p=0.003), and 29 (p=0.01). However, for the remaining questions, question 2 (p=0.52), 5 (p=0.19), 11 (p=0.12), 15 (p=0.28), 20 (p=0.26), and 21 (p=0.07), pre- and post-survey responses were not found to significantly differ (see Table 3).

Results Associated with Non-Normally Distributed Data

Data associated with questions 3 (W=0.82, p=0.03), 4 (W=0.89, p=0.03), 6 (W=0.86, p=0.01), 7 (W=0.85, p=0.01), 8 (W=0.79, p=0.001), 9 (W=0.78, p=0.001), 10

(W=0.85, p=0.01), 12 (W=0.86, p=0.01), 13 (W=0.80, p=0.001), 14 (W=0.89, p=0.04),

18 (W=0.88, p=0.03), 22 (0.80, p=0.002), 23 (W=0.88, p=0.02), 24 (W=0.86, p=0.01), 25

(W=0.82, p=0.003), and 30 (W=0.84, p=0.005) were found to be not normally distributed

with the use of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality (see Table 2 for Question

Descriptions). The Shapiro-Wilk test is used in frequent statistics and is a test of

normality, which in this case is an appropriate form of measure to be used.

In addition, when subjected to a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test, which is used to

compare like data, paired tests and when data are not independent and when the

dependency results in a 1 to 1 match, the results illustrate that teachers pre- and post-

survey responses substantially differed for questions 3 (p=0.04), 4 (p=0.04), 7 (p=0.04), 8

(p=0.03), 9 (p=0.02), 12 (p=0.01), 24 (p=0.03), 25 (p=0.03), and 30 (p=0.30). However,

for the remaining questions, question 6 (p=0.06), 10 (p=0.17), 13 (p=0.11), 14 (p=0.07),

18 (p=0.10), 22 (p=0.07), and 23 (p=0.11), pre- and post-survey responses were not

found to substantially differ (see Table 4).

Table 4

Pre- and Post-Survey Data from the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test
(Non-Normally Distributed Data)

Question	Test Statistic	P-Value
3. How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need?	-2.02	0.04
4. How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school?	-2.02	0.04
6. How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home?	-1.89	0.06

Table 4 (continued)

Question	Test Statistic	P-Value
7. How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?	-2.02	0.04
8. How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons?	-2.20	0.03
9. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?	-1.36	0.02
10. How much can you do to get students to work together?	-2.30	0.17
12. How much can you do to get children to do their homework?	-2.52	0.01
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	-1.60	0.11
14. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	-1.83	0.07
18. How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school?	-1.68	0.10
22. How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school?	-1.89	0.07
23. How much can you do to make the school a safe place?	-1.6	0.11
24. How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?	-2.20	0.03
25. How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?	-2.20	0.03
30. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	-2.20	0.03

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The nature of relationships among the administrators, teachers, and staff within a school has a greater impact on the character and quality of that school and on student

achievement than any other factor (Barth, 2006). The relationships among the educators in a school characterize all relationships within that school's culture. A positive school culture is established when there is a collegial culture in place in which educators talk about practice, share their knowledge with others, and encourage the success of others (Barth, 2006). Collegiality is seen as a way to foster professional growth and encourage school improvement.

At the conclusion of each face-to-face interview, I encouraged participants to share anything in reference to their teaching of special needs students in the CAPS District. All of the participants felt like they were a part of a close-knit family where they provided support to each other whenever needed. Teachers at CAPS constantly shared materials, resources, and strategies with each other. Participant 2 responded with:

> I've worked at other districts but not as a teacher, so this is my only career district. But I definitely feel that I know that I can go across the hall to kindergarten teachers and ask, "I've tried this to help this child improve their comprehension skills, what do you do?" Because sometimes you do feel like "Oh, I've tried everything." And like I said, the Child Study Team's doors are always open.

> This school was basically people from small communities in south jersey, I came from the outside and I was not accepted very well at first because I was like an outsider. I mean they all knew each other and related and whatever, but it did give the school a family feel and they did warm up and open up and eventually it's very touching, and even as the new teachers come in, it hasn't changed. It's still a

very warm, welcoming school and everybody helps each other. It's very nice. I've been blessed.

I definitely feel, as far as the needs of the kids, Special Ed or not there's a nice culture of teachers that are willing, people are willing to help each other and you don't necessarily feel bad if you're struggling with meeting the needs of a student in your classroom because you know that you can go to another teacher for help. I mean, we're sitting in a room full of resources for teachers.

Participant 6 shared how they pass techniques on to other teachers. She shared: "Sometimes we actually pass techniques on to other teachers. We are good here about sharing. If we find something that works we will share that technique with each other."

Another teacher talked about how she tries to provide the same warm and welcoming environment for the students so that they enjoy coming to school. She prided herself in being the main point person for students in eighth grade. She stated:

You have to have a positive attitude. I'm always singing just trying to make it a place they want to come and not be miserable. I'm always at their locker that's kind of my hangout in essence. So I think they know that I'm the go to person in eighth grade, if they need anything they usually come to me first.

Participant 8 spoke so highly of the school district. From the endless support from administration, good rapport with the community and board members, she declared that CAPS is a wonderful place to work. She stated:

I know just from being here the many years that I have, this is a wonderful place to work. The staff is very close the administration is wonderful, very supportive

of our needs and wants. I don't think there's a teacher in the building that doesn't

feel free to go to administration and talk to them about what they need or

problems that they're having. We have a very good rapport with our community,

with our board members and I know that that's not the case in all school districts

and that saddens me, but this is an ideal situation. We have a little school district;

I think kids get all the help they need. They feel it's a safe environment that we

provide and it's a happy environment.

Participant 2 talked about the importance of having a great child study team and

how they are such a great resource to her. She stated:

The Child Study Team has always been a wealth of knowledge. We are fortunate

to have good therapy services. Both our OT and PT are really good. So I am able

to use them, they do activities in the classroom. They will do activities in the

classroom and they will collaborate with me on how to implement these same

activities myself.

Participant 3 shared the support she receives from teachers in other districts. She

shared: "I have the support of teachers in other districts. Even though I collaborate a lot

with Kindergarten it is nice to have that network of teachers to share curriculum ideas."

Participant 4 talked about how helpful the teachers and the Child Study Team is

when it comes to asking for help about a particular student. She responded:

Our classroom teachers are a tremendous help and the Child Study Team's a huge

help too. They are really supportive and they know the kids so well because they

see them on a daily basis for longer amounts of time that the special teachers do.

So if I have been seeing a problem, they've been seeing it in the classroom for a

considerable amount of time before hand and they already have an arsenal of ways to kind of figure it out.

Participant 6 agreed with the other participants in terms of how much the Child Study Team helps them. She shared:

We're very close to the Child Study Team. Each of our kids has a case manager so they are assigned someone that we keep. They let me know why a student is behaving a certain way or if something happened at home or there's been a change so it's kind of both ways that we talk to each other.

Participant 9 discussed the support mechanisms in place to address behavioral concerns. She shared:

If it's a behavior issue we develop a behavioral plan, we can get together with the school psychologist or the Child Study Team depending on who the child is, if it's an IEP student or not. There are tiers and levels and groups that we can go to help us with behavior issues if we need it. First I try and use whatever tricks I have developed over the years, consequences or white cards and see what kind of success that we are having with that before I go to any outside of the classroom for help.

Establishing a culture of learning was very important for the teachers at CAPS. The focus on instruction and student achievement at CAPS has transformed the culture by shifting focus to student learning. Teachers work hard to personalize instruction for a diverse population of students. Teachers felt that a positive school culture helped students achieve at higher levels. By working together teachers believed they had a better understanding of their content area. Establishing a culture of learning requires everyone

working together. The teachers at CAPS believed that everyone had a duty to build a positive, responsive, and dynamic culture.

Conclusion

It is increasingly apparent that general and special educators must continue to learn about themselves and their own teaching efficacy to build bridges of cultural valuing, empathy, understanding, and human interaction (Banks, 1999; Obiakor, 1999). When it comes to the education of students with special needs, general and special education teachers and parents must understand the process of differentiated instruction so that the lower level learners or students with special needs can understand delivered instruction. This may produce positive outcomes when teachers acknowledge and affirm their teacher efficacy, cultural values and beliefs of students with special needs. (Gay, 2000; Gordon, 1997; Ladson Billings 1995b, 2000).

In order to focus on the needs of students, special educators, general educators, parents, administrators, child study team members and most importantly, the students, all need to work collaboratively to ensure that not only are the students getting the education they deserve, but learning life skills as well to prepare them for when they become adults. Educators must eliminate their discriminatory referral and assessment, undue processes, disempowerment, and improper inclusion/exclusion in educational programming (Ford, Obiakor & Patton, 1995; Grossman, 1998; Obiakor & Schwenn, 1996; Winzer & Mazurek, 1998).

In order to encourage change, school leaders with the most business savvy usually obtain the appropriate sum of money to allocate for the school year. In order to prepare special needs students to become productive citizens in the community, they should be

entitled to free and appropriate education. One component of a free and appropriate education is the necessary resources and materials that will prepare both teachers and students. In order to implement academic success for students with special needs, school leaders and administrators first must identify the immediate needs of the school when planning the budget, once the immediate needs are met, the additional monies can be set aside for the purchase of manipulatives and differentiated instruction materials for students with learning disabilities.

The lack of differentiated instructional materials by special and general education teachers, poor teacher efficacy, and poor pedagogical practices lead to a disservice to special needs students (Delpit, 2006). Overall, children with learning disabilities are not as successful as they can be because of insufficient materials and being placed in an environment that restricts them from learning based on their IEP (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Chapter 6

Summary and Recommendations

In this study the relationship between teachers' perception of their pedagogical knowledge and beliefs and teachers' sense of self-efficacy was examined. Empirical data found efficacy beliefs influenced the level of effort teachers put into teaching, their perseverance during difficult situations, their readiness to try new strategies to better meet the needs of their students, their persistence in working with students with special needs, their enthusiasm and commitment to the teaching profession, and their willingness to communicate and collaborate with other teachers (Allinder, 1994; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Coladarci, 1992; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). This study presented an extension of these data by including the concepts of belief and knowledge and how this impacted a teacher's efficacy development. This particular study was aimed at helping general and special education teachers understand, develop, and implement pedagogical practices that would increase their ability to educate students with special needs.

This study found that after teachers participated in a professional development focused on teacher self-efficacy, their efficacy levels increased in several different areas. Teachers felt more confident in their ability to keep students on task during difficult assignments. The professional development gave teachers strategies on how to help students' complete assignments that may challenge them academically. Also, the professional development increased the efficacy levels of teachers in the area of how much they felt they could do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons. Teachers also felt more confident in their abilities to make students believe they could do well with their schoolwork.

Specifically, teacher efficacy is rooted in social cognitive theory because self-reflection is a major component of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). Through self-reflection, people gain an understanding of their experiences, explore their own self-beliefs, engage in self-evaluation, and change their way of thinking and behavior (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). The foundation of social cognitive theory is self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1994). Amongst the first is the study of efficacy performed by the Rand organization that discovered.

> Teachers' sense of efficacy had a strong positive effect not only on student performance, but on the percentage of project goals achieved, on the amount of teacher change, and on the continued use of project methods and materials after the project ended. (Tschannern-Moran & Hoy, 1998, p. 204)

In addition, various researchers have provided detailed comprehensive understanding of the influences of the environment and teacher control (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1977, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Riggs & Enochs, 1990; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). This study explored the role that efficacy played between knowledge, pedagogical beliefs, and teachers' performance. This study found a significant relation between teachers' demonstrated pedagogical knowledge and teacher efficacy.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is a critical concept to consider because of its connection to student motivation and student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Henson, 2001; Pajares, 1996; Ross & Bruce, 2007). Teacher efficacy is also "The conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome" (Bandura, 1977,

p. 193). According to Ross and Bruce (2007), teacher efficacy can be described as "A teacher's expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning" (p. 50). Collectively, efficacy is a consequence of school climate, teacher empowerment, and instructional support, which can aid in the result of teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Henson, 2001). The research conducted to substantiate the significance of teacher efficacy with school success includes studies pertaining to efficacy and teacher burnout, efficacy as it relates to teacher's age and experience, and efficacy and instructional practices (Cheung, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Wolter & Daugherty, 2007). This study found that because of the positive school culture at the research site, coupled with the professional development and strategies provided, teachers worked together and supported each other, which empowered them to provide the best instructional support to students. These factors combined aided in a collective efficacy among the school, which increased the teachers' level of efficacy.

The purpose of this study was to utilize a professional development model incorporating action research to enhance teachers' pedagogical practices and therefore increase their level of self-efficacy through a cyclical process. Furthermore, this study analyzed the impact and influence that action research had on the efficacy sub-constructs of classroom management, instructional practices, and student engagement. As in the case of one of the teachers in this study, she was not as much concerned with effective pedagogical practices as she was with effective classroom management.

In addition, this study utilized Bandura's Teacher Efficacy Scale to investigate the levels of teacher efficacy beliefs and attitudes toward instructing students with special

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needs. This study also examined variables influencing teacher efficacy beliefs related to student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.

Professional development is the principal opportunity for implementing transformation within a school or district and for keeping teachers abreast of the current trends in education (Dana &Yendol-Hoppey, 2003; Guskey, 1998; Rogers-Adkinson et al., 2003; Schacter & Thum, 2005). An effective professional development session is typically defined as an open form that teachers can bounce ideas around in hope to improving the results of student achievement (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002.

Although this research did not examine the achievement of students in the participating teachers' classrooms, it did examine teaching practices and how their efficacy levels were impacted by the action research intervention. This study extended the research of Ross and Bruce (2007) in view of how specific forms of professional development may positively impact teacher efficacy. Ross and Bruce highlighted the impact of teacher efficacy and how it can increase student achievement as well as developing techniques that will upsurge a teacher's sense of efficacy. Because professional development is the main avenue for promoting change and impacting teacher efficacy, Ross and Bruce (2007) state, "it is logical to consider if professional development in the form of a series of teacher workshops will increase teacher efficacy" (p. 164). The professional development provided to teachers in this study equipped them with various techniques to implement within the classroom to better serve the needs of their diverse students. The techniques offered enabled teachers to increase their self-efficacy to teach students with special needs.

This study extended this idea by considering a unique form of professional development and its potential impact on teacher's perceived abilities to instruct students with special needs. Through participation in professional development activities and focus groups, teachers were able to further develop their teaching capabilities in terms of what they taught and how well they used the knowledge and skills they have learned to teach it effectively. The teachers involved in this study all experienced an increase in their confidence levels in their ability to promote student learning.

Change Framework

In conclusion, Fullan's (2004) five components of leadership fit perfectly within the context of my study. Teachers have to be much more attuned to the educational landscape as it relates to students with special needs, while also being much more sophisticated at conceptual thinking in order to transform their instruction and improve teacher accountability and efficacy. Teachers must always be on the quest for continuous improvement. This study has shown that teachers play a major role in the culture of change for a school district. I believe that developing and exercising these five components of leadership in a culture of change must take place on a personal level in order for them to be effective in a professional environment. As teachers and leaders, we cannot ask others to do something we are not willing to do, and we cannot model one thing at work, but not practice those same things in our personal lives.

Answers to Research Questions

The questions developed for this research were based on the need to develop effective pedagogical approaches for teachers working with students with special needs. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perception

of their pedagogical knowledge and beliefs and teachers' sense of self-efficacy. The four research questions guided inquiry into the efficacy of both general and special education teachers and provided future recommendations for stakeholders in the planning of professional development for teachers who work with students with special needs.

Research question 1. What were general and special education teachers' perceptions of their teacher efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs?

The purpose of Cycle One was to collect data to gather perceptions regarding participants' ability to influence the outcome of their students within the classrooms and to conduct a focus group that asked several questions pertaining to: teacher instruction, pedagogical practices, and teacher confidence. In Cycle One, teachers were asked to take part in two activities that allowed them to experience some of the frustrations that students with special needs feel on a daily basis. For the first activity, teachers watched a video where people were passing a ball around and they were asked to keep count of how many times the ball was passed. A gorilla surfaced in the video and the teachers never noticed the gorilla, even after watching the video several times. The teachers were all amazed that they could miss something that blatant in the video, but because they were all fixated on getting an accurate count of how many times the ball was passed they missed the obvious.

This activity allowed the teachers to get a glimpse of how students with special needs have difficulty focusing and so at times may be hyper-focused on one task and can miss the rest of the assignment. After this activity, all of the teachers agreed that they would be mindful when giving students with special needs multi-step directions and also

not being so hard on them if they miss part of the assignment or turn something in incomplete.

In the note-taking exercise, teachers were frustrated because they were unable to succeed at the task given to them. The teachers exhibited many of the same behaviors that a frustrated student would give when they were unable to grasp something. Some of the teachers folded their arms and pouted, some teachers gave up, and one teacher verbally expressed her frustration by saying: "This isn't fair." This activity allowed teachers to understand how sometimes students with special needs may have incomplete notes or do not finish an assignment in a certain amount of time. At the completion of this exercise, the group discussed what could be done differently the next time a student is frustrated because they could not complete or master a specific task. The teachers agreed that this exercise helped them be more aware of the frustration that students exhibit and to be more cognizant to the reason why and not just the behavior.

The selective awareness and note-taking exercises that I conducted with participants allowed them to feel how students with special needs felt on a daily basis. These activities allowed teachers to examine their own beliefs and behaviors that hinder the process of student learning. These activities inspired teachers to improve how they engaged students. The teachers discovered the importance of using differentiated instruction to assess and modify instruction to meet the needs of diverse learning styles. Based on the results of the general and special education teachers, all of the participants believed that they had a false sense of confidence in their ability to instruct and support students with special needs. There were several factors that affected their confidence level such as students being pulled out of class, lack of preparation time leading up to

implementing the activity, and the lack of time/frequency that teachers see students with special needs.

Additionally, general education teachers felt that their inability to build a rapport with special education students was a huge factor in their lack of confidence in working with students with special needs. General education teachers felt that the special education teachers had an unspoken bond with special education students and as a result could serve these students better. The general education teachers found it hard to build these types of bonds with students. The confidence level of teachers working with special needs students also varied depending on the subject that they were teaching.

Balancing time was another common theme identified in terms of teacher efficacy. Teachers shared that at times they found it very hard to balance their time to make sure that each student received adequate attention. There would be times that some students with special needs would be sitting the entire class period with nothing to do, because teachers have spent the whole period going over the lesson or helping other students. Teachers felt that this negatively affected their efficacy levels because 45 minutes should never pass within a class and students have been sitting the whole class period without any assistance or help.

Another theme that was identified in terms of teacher efficacy to instruct and support students with special needs was the struggle to achieve self-efficacy in the delivery of instruction. Although teachers modified instruction, they struggled in the level of comfort in doing so. The teachers were unsure of whether their techniques were effective. The confidence level of teachers had a direct impact on their ability to develop and implement activities to achieve their desired learning outcome for their

students/classroom. Teachers who were comfortable in the subject matter or had a passion for what they were teaching were much more confident in their abilities. However, the teachers that were not as confident in what they were teaching felt it was more challenging to help students.

Research question 2. What pedagogical approaches improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities?

The second question focused on the pedagogical approaches that improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities. Teachers were given nine different strategies to choose from and to implement in the classroom. The nine strategies were: Accommodating Strategies, Learning Styles, Effective Instructional Practices, Instructional Interventions, Engaged Learning Styles, Classroom Management, Behavior Instructions, Teacher Support and Response to Intervention, and Teacher Support Strategies.

Differentiating instruction was the most popular pedagogical approach that improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities. All of the teachers involved in this study chose differentiated instruction as a support mechanism. The teachers felt good about themselves when they introduced concepts to students, but taught them in several different ways so all students could feel success. All of the teachers who used differentiated instruction felt it was effective because all students were exposed to the same lesson but in different ways. By special education students experiencing success in their academic endeavors in turn increased their level of efficacy because teachers were able to see each student work independently without becoming frustrated or shut down.

Another support mechanism was engaged learning style that improved teacher efficacy to support students with disabilities was engaged learning. After the professional development session with the teachers, they went back to their classrooms and tried to incorporate more time and opportunities for students to discuss and collaborate in groups. Teachers became more aware that how students were seated in the classroom could positively or negatively contribute to their learning. For example, one teacher/participant had one student who was a behavior problem. She sat that child in the back of the classroom because she thought that if she sat him in the back, he would not disrupt the class, but in reality, she should have placed him in the front of the class because it would have engaged and kept him on task. Because teachers had such positive experiences with collaborating with groups among peers, they believed that incorporating this same strategy in the classroom could have the same effect.

Giving students the chance to take charge of their learning by talking about topics and explaining their thinking and understanding was a great help when introducing a new topic. At first, teachers were hesitant about using group discussions to help develop students' conceptual understanding because they were uncertain if they would be able to handle it. However, teachers soon learned that they underestimated themselves and their students. A large majority of students were able to express their thoughts and thinking to their peers and as a group they were able to work through discrepancies and new ideas. This improved teacher efficacy because teachers were able to see first-hand that they were doing something right and when they challenged students in the correct way that worked for them, they could learn.

Research question 3. How did educators use differentiated instruction to increase academic success for students with special needs?

Teachers used a variety of methods to differentiate instruction to increase academic success for students with special needs. Many of the teachers chose modifications and accommodations as an effective technique for working with students with special needs. A modification that many of the teachers implemented was differentiating by content. Differentiating by content refers to a change in the material being learned by the student. Teachers found that using different content to teach the same subject to students with different needs and enhancing or augmenting existing content to make it accessible to all students increased the academic success for students with special needs. The teachers believed that the main goal for working with students with special needs was success and understanding of the skills being taught. When differentiating by content, teachers would determine what the main concepts were that they wanted students to take away from the activity or lesson.

Another form of modification that educators found increased academic success was differentiating by process. Differentiating by process involves providing varied opportunities for students to process or make sense of the content being taught. Differentiating by process refers to how a student comes to understand and assimilate facts, concepts, and skills (Anderson, 2007). Teachers found that by allowing special needs students to learn based on the method that was easiest for them to acquire knowledge was helpful in teaching lessons. Some of the teachers allowed students to read about a topic, while some students would prefer to listen about that same topic. Teachers

found success in the end, because despite students using different methods of learning, they were all able to grasp the main concepts of the lesson.

Teachers also used grouping as an effective method of modification. After teaching a lesson, some teachers would break students up into small groups based on ability and readiness. After students were broken up into groups, teachers would give students a series of questions related to the objectives of the lesson based on each groups' ability and readiness level. Teachers found that by grouping students based on their ability, students were able to help each other answer the questions. Teachers found this method of differentiating instruction was very helpful in working with students with special needs, because grouping by ability allowed students to proceed through the information at a pace that was comfortable for them.

Another strategy identified by teachers was differentiating by product. Differentiating by product is how teachers expect students to demonstrate what they have learned. The term product refers to items a student can use to demonstrate what they have learned, understand, or are able to do as the result of a series of lessons. For teachers in this study, this differentiated instruction method included allowing students to teach another student, taking a test, summarizing key points from research or a lesson, and writing a paper. Teachers found this method effective because it caused students to rethink what they learned, apply what they can do, and engage in critical and creative thinking.

The research that supports differentiated instruction as a modification has great impact in teaching all over the world, bringing major changes in the way teachers visualize and practice teaching (Stanford & Reeves, 2009). With classrooms becoming

more diverse than ever due to the increase in the number of students with different ability and readiness levels, special education students' educational equity acquires a new meaning (King-Shaver, 2008). Differentiated instruction has a positive impact on student attendance, engagement, and classroom behavior. The teachers involved in this study measured an increase in student achievement after differentiated instructional strategies were initiated. Also through differentiating instruction, teachers recognized the importance of collaborating with colleagues.

Differentiation is an approach to teaching in which teachers plan strategically in order to meet the needs of all of their diverse learners in an inclusive setting (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005; Chapman & King, 2003). Teachers in this study provided a variety of ways for students to acquire content, to process and make sense of ideas, and to express what they learned. Teachers provided a welcoming learning environment in which they encouraged students to ask questions, allowed students to make mistakes in the process of learning, taught students that different was acceptable, and expected students to learn and grow. Teachers modified the curriculum or content of what they taught for different students based on the interest levels, learning styles, strengths, and challenges.

Research question 4. How did my leadership foster the development of teacher efficacy to impact students with special needs?

It is important for leaders to have a good relationship with their staff and peers while developing them into accountable, aspiring, professional leaders. My leadership allowed me to develop and demonstrate conscious efforts on encouraging team spirit, team building, and improving relationships, while promoting positive school culture. My

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leadership enhanced the morale of teachers working with students with special needs and the school environment as a whole. This is reflected in the telephone calls and emails from teacher/participants thanking me for the instructional strategies that I delivered though professional development, as well as making myself available via digital mediums to answer questions and have general conversations. I enjoyed the personal contact with these teachers and experienced the true meaning of sincerity and compassion which are two qualities that I exhibit which garners me the respect of teachers, administration, and parents. By making teachers feel comfortable in their own surroundings I was able to motivate them in achieving a common goal.

As a special education teacher, I knew that special education students feel alienated. Acknowledging this factor allowed me the opportunity to provide an environment that was inspiring to teachers to become productive teachers and in turn boost students' morale and academic success. My belief was that behind every successful leader there were supportive teachers and effective leadership supports, which empowered others. At the research site, my leadership role was to ensure, maintain, and encourage group motivation, participation, communication, accountability, shared decision making, and the success of all in the school setting. Incorporating all of these values connected our goal setting ventures to a higher altitude of success for the staff, students, community, and stakeholders.

My leadership helped teachers to think about the ways they approached tasks in their classrooms when working with students with special needs. Furthermore, my leadership allowed teachers the opportunity to assess the ways in which they attempted to structure teaching tasks such as introducing new strategies and methods and selecting

activities, all of which allowed them to grow professionally and feel confident and competent in their abilities. By working with these teachers I helped them to be reflective about the areas they felt confident in and the areas where they struggled or felt the least competent.

My leadership helped teachers to recognize that by having a low level of teacher efficacy or feeling unprepared or incompetent led to them avoiding critical classroom tasks. Over time, these teachers consciously or unconsciously avoided certain students, specifically students with special needs as a way to protect their sense of self. My leadership caused teachers to face their feelings of failure or inadequacy by engaging them in a series of activities and professional development, which helped to build their efficacy through observing colleagues. One teacher found my leadership to be very helpful. This is supported by her stating:

> I took what information you gave and what we talked about and heard from others and thought about using that in my practice. It was very helpful to get that information. Getting this information from you showed me what I don't know.

Another teacher talked about how she learned more through the collaborations and professional development. She discussed: "I learned through collaboration as well, so this has been helpful in regards, so that's been good. I do feel like I learned so much through the feedback you gave me on the e-mail."

A Special Education teacher discussed how I helped her discover the importance of Special Ed meetings. She shared:

I think he made us realize though we have more Special Ed departmental meetings now. It was kind of our own little entities, and we said we wanted to do that more, meeting with Michael kind of made us push us in the right direction.

This particular teacher discussed how the two strategies she selected from the professional development activities were successful in her classroom and how she plans to incorporate these techniques in all her classes moving forward. She stated:

I want to thank you for you giving us guidance on various strategies and allowing us to pick two to implement in our classroom. At first I wasn't sure if they were going to work. But you helped me through every step of the way. I am happy to say that these strategies I will continue to use because they helped my students.

A special area teacher shared her thoughts on how I helped her become more cognizant of follow the accommodations and recommendations of the IEP. She discussed:

As a special area teacher who teaches the whole school, sometimes we're aware of IEPs and accommodations and recommendations and stuff that are in there, but with 440 kids, sometimes it's a little hard to keep track of who's who. I just think that this whole process with you has helped me be a little more aware of what I need to do and be more focused on specifics. You helped me realize that I should check their IEP often to make sure I am doing everything I'm supposed to do. It's just the awareness factor I think.

Summary

Attitudes, values, and efficacy beliefs of general and special education teachers are important to the academic success of students with special needs. Teachers with a

high sense of efficacy truly believed that they could influence the academic success of students with special needs. Teachers with high levels of efficacy were open to new ideas and more willing to try new strategies and pedagogical practices. In contrast, the teachers with low efficacy felt they had minimal influence on the academic success of students with special needs. These teachers also gave up more easily when confronted with new strategies and pedagogical practices. All of the teachers benefited from my professional development, which encouraged support from other teachers and collaboration, while also introducing new strategies to implement when working with students with special needs. As a leader, I was able to increase teacher efficacy, and more importantly, have the opportunity to improve instruction for students.

Chapter 7

Leadership Reflection

A leader is an individual who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of a significant number of individuals (Gardner, 1996). As a doctoral candidate, I learned that my 21st century leadership skills (instructional, community, and visionary) enabled me to develop core values, which were necessary to achieve personal success as well as to enrich the community. My interpersonal skills allowed me to cultivate a supportive learning environment and reinforce high academic standards, policies, and goals. Also, I realized that students' views were essential to their learning and should be taken into consideration; therefore, it is critical that leadership, which includes faculty, educators, as well as parents and the school community, work together to create a productive and collaborative learning environment.

At the start of my doctoral program, I was lacking the foundation of leadership because I did not fully understand the concept of leadership theory. Now that I have completed my doctoral studies, I have a much better understanding of the concept of leadership and I feel as though I am evolving and transforming into the leader I intend to be through my learned and espoused leadership theories. Leaders must have a high level of integrity, character, as well as being willing to share the knowledge that empowers followers such as teachers, administrators, and students. Leaders can also harness the moral beliefs of the followers to create a vision that works in the greater good of our community and world. Great leaders move us through speech, strategies, visions, along with powerful ideas (Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2002). Therefore, it is important to

gain knowledge from within and expand on building and developing myself as a 21st century leader.

Aptly, Bennis (1989) demonstrates that although leadership is still often the "most studied and least understood topic in social science" (p. 20) it is important to define what type of leader you are. In the field of education, there are many styles of leadership. The most recognized forms of leadership are transactional and transformational leadership styles. Transactional leadership is usually characterized by factors of contingent reward and management-by-exception (Bass, 1985). This is a form of leadership that is effective when systems are in place and the organization operates on norms and rules that have already been established. Principals, administrators, and superintendents are more likely to use this style of leadership, because it gives them the opportunity to assess and evaluate their school and/or the school district.

Leadership cannot lead alone, however, and its' effectiveness strongly depends on the participants and their participation. According to Wren (1995), followers are part of the leadership process because it enables both to work together toward the common goal. This is why it is important to study different leadership styles and find the one that best fits your agenda. Organizations and structures that are not willing to promote change, can lose sight of their vision and find themselves stagnate in terms of progress (Kotter, 1996). It is important to work as a collective group, especially in time of crisis, to find a solution for a problem that can disrupt the entire infrastructure of a school and its culture. As an educator and social change agent, it is important to remember the Five Components of Leadership which are: Moral Purpose, Understanding Change, Building Relationships, Creating & Sharing Knowledge, and Making Coherence (Fullan, 2004). This can serve as

a tool kit for change that will allow both parties to accept change in their school or organization.

In this Educational Leadership Doctoral Program, I developed an understanding of basic leadership models and approaches. I applied my newly acquired skills to better assess my personal leadership values, strengths, and weaknesses. In order to accomplish my goals, I needed to find myself personally and as a leader. In the midst of all the readings, articles, and conducting my research for my dissertation, I asked myself how would I use my mild mannered, soft spoken personality to lead in a culture that constantly changes.

I knew it would be to my advantage to use a charismatic approach when dealing with change. I also knew that ambiguity along with self-awareness and self-respect helped improve relationships and ethics in the work place and in the community in which I served. Those qualities alone gave me my leadership style, which consisted of moral, servant, transactional, and transformational approaches that helped me convert theory into practice.

As a transformational leader I was energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate. A transformational leader also is focused on helping every member of staff or professional learning community to succeed. I did this by ensuring that I was concerned and involved in the process. My transactional leadership style included me making it clear on what I wanted, goals to be accomplished, performance expectations, and I established a clear link between goals and rewards. As a transactional leader it was important to observe teachers and to not only point out mistakes, but to provide solutions to correct mistakes.

As a servant leader, it was important for me to encourage and inspire. This allowed me to spark positive change in those who followed me. My servant leadership style allowed me to exhibit my caring personality and my ability to create strong interpersonal relationships. My moral leadership style allowed me to guide and lead the way by example. As a moral leader, I showcased my ability to persuade others. In order to persuade others, my personal integrity must be visible to others. As a moral leader I worked fervently to develop the abilities of others.

As I conducted a further examination of my leadership, I realized that I was emerging as a social justice practitioner in the field of education. I did not realize some of the tenets of social justice leadership until I examined the data and reflected further on my leadership and then saw the connection. Social justice leaders are visionaries who want equitable membership by all groups of society. This emergence is evidenced in my research questions and in the professional development that I conducted to provide both special education and general education teachers with the skills, knowledge, and aptitude to effectively instruct in inclusion classrooms. Furthermore, social justice leaders are also desirous of wanting all members of society to be treated equitably, such as my desire to see special needs students treated and educated equitably, with each person of each group receiving an equitable distribution of resources that fit their physiological and safety needs first, and their needs for love, self-esteem, and self-actualization, second (Maslow, 1970).

While I know that I am required to do extensive research on my topic area, the information that I gathered helped me develop my Problem Statement, Literature Review, and Action Research Plan. My Action Research Project consisted of students with

learning disabilities not receiving the appropriate level of education due to lack of teacher

efficacy and pedagogical practices from both general and special education teachers.

In my study, I focused on the teachers' ability to instruct students with special needs by

implementing the Danielson Framework with emphasis on domain three (Instruction).

This particular domain consists of communicating with students, implementing proper

questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, using proper

assessment in instruction, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness (Danielson,

2013). I have conducted interviews and focus groups to collect data. I then analyzed the

data and came up with innovative strategies and pedagogical practices to instruct students

with special needs.

Prior to completing my coursework and dissertation, I did not have the level of

self-awareness that I have now. I realized that overuse or reliance on one style could lead

to boundary issues or leave less experienced individuals without guidance and leadership.

Leadership to me now is clearly an earned responsibility that depends on emotionally

intelligent and transparent relationships. My concept of leadership has changed over the

course of my doctoral studies; some individuals are born leaders, however I realized that

leadership can be a learned process, as well. Leadership happens when good leaders are

made, not born. A great leader knows that leadership is a never-ending process of self-

study, education, training, and experience (Jago, 1982).

Most importantly, the impact of my doctoral program has expanded my content

knowledge and improved my ability to lead through learning and implementing various

leadership theories in my day-to-day activities. In turn, I recognized that I must critique

my own leadership style and emotional intelligence. Realization enabled me to foresee

that I set the emotional standard for my own leadership; my espoused theory was very much different from my theories in use. I had to assess how my style of leadership impacted me as an administrator. My doctoral courses have given me the opportunity to evaluate my current administrator's emotional intelligence, leadership style, and philosophies. I always strived to be an effective and collaborative leader, however, there may be a difference between my ideals of leadership and what I actually do. I am building major awareness around my espoused theories vs. theories in use. Since I have successfully completed the Educational Leadership Program at Rowan University, I am positive that this endeavor has prepared me to focus on how to build a collaborative learning organization and be empowered to apply theories and current research to my job, community, and philosophy of education.

To be sure, leadership has several different definitions, but I chose to define leadership as creating a vision that gives an organization an identity and incorporating that vision into action by way of interacting with others. My leadership philosophy was to form a partnership with students, staff, and the community to ensure each student acquired the knowledge, skills, and core values necessary to achieve personal success. As a leader it was my goal to develop leaders within the learning environment. It was essential that staff, parents, and the community harmoniously created an effective learning environment that fostered change. As a lifetime learner, I support my philosophy by demonstrating, maintaining, and understanding the current reforms and diverse program developments that can enhance the learning environment. My ultimate goal as a leader was to aide staff and students to embrace learning by creating an environment that motivates learning and cultivates leaders.

Specifically, the humanistic approach best describes my professional and personal self. It is important to build relationships and foster development of those around me. In my educational career, I have been bestowed with the opportunity to work under the leadership of a principal with effective communication skills and the ability to embrace his staff collectively; enabling his staff to feel like family. In turn, the staff embraced his views and began to do their utmost in adopting his outlooks and overall assessment for change. The staff did not mind going the extra mile to show their appreciation, because they were treated with absolute respect.

As I strive to be an effective leader, it is essential to my leadership to prepare to be a reflective practitioner, because it will provide an opportunity for me to engage in an internal reflective process. This will enable me to evaluate past situations, establish decision-making strategies, contemplate my dealings and reasons for the decisions that I made, and reflect on alternate strategies that could have been done differently to produce a different outcome. Overall, these new concepts provide opportunities to compare and contrast my current and past performance, and will ensure a more proactive response to future endeavors. It is good to know that there is a descriptive title or name for my particular leadership style. I am inspired with the great enthusiastic possibility of being a leader with impeccable aspirations through this developmental venture of escalating a wider range of leadership approaches that ensure all staff members of my professional and personal journey near their individual goals.

Indeed, as I continue my educational journey, I am learning to lead and recognize my strengths and weaknesses through self-reflection. I will be able to evaluate my performance, positive or negative, and develop strategies for improvement as needed.

Leadership is a learned process that continues to develop through experience and guidance. Each principal that I have had the chance to work under has his own style of leadership skills and I am pleased to have experienced working under each of them. As a result, the three principals have given me insight on effective and ineffective leadership skills. I will utilize their effective leadership skills to assist me in becoming an effective leader.

To be sure, being an effective leader would encourage and empower staff, increase the morale of staff, and make it easier for staff to communicate with administrators. It is also essential for an effective leader to have an open mind when transitioning into a new leadership position. My ultimate goal in education is to become a life-long learner and a positive role model to my peers, staff, students, and the community. Education is the basis of success that will assist me throughout my career. As I venture through this process of developing myself as a leader, I need to keep in mind that I am a work in progress.

Recommendations for School Leaders

In the hierarchy of the educational school building, the principal is a leader who facilitates, instructs, encourages, ensures, confers, establishes, and supports a school and its community to move towards a common goal. Therefore, the principal should be responsible for developing and monitoring appropriate committees regarding exceptional children issues in the school and ensuring that all records for identifying exceptional children are complete and in compliance according to state and federal regulations. The principal should also monitor the process within the school, which ensures that the

confidential records of any identified child in the school are kept up to date, and in compliance.

Special education teachers should be responsible for implementing the IEP and assuring that a subsequent IEP is developed before the ending date of the previous IEP so that continuous service will be afforded to any identified special needs child. The special education teacher is responsible for maintaining his or her student's confidential records in compliance with all local, state, and federal procedures by initialing and completing any needed information or forms in a timely manner.

Over the years, there have been general and special educators who tried to implement instruction to engage students with special needs. However, if we really want to have a massive effect on these students, we have to exhaust the literature as it relates to the art of teaching. The research states that if we as educators and administrators are going to change this culture, we may have to look at the teaching profession (Noguera, 2003). This study focused on teaching strategies that enhanced the ability of the teacher to instruct lower level learners. When teachers lack the sensitivity and understanding towards students during this sensitive stage of the process, they are met with difficulties that create a fall-out in the developmental structure of the classroom setting and the cohesive instructional vision is lost in the aftermath.

Noticeably, the special education population of students from surrounding districts has increased dramatically; however, teachers are not willing to embrace a culturally responsive pedagogy that will assist students with special needs (Gay, 2002). In order for differentiated instruction to become effective, there are two things that must happen: (a) construct and demonstrate the need to reorganize the current teacher

education pedagogy, and (b) establish new guidelines in developing a pedagogy aimed in culturally responsive teaching.

In addition, Cochran-Smith (2004) discusses how teachers must be willing to overcome their discomfort as well as fear of tackling issues of multi-grade level instruction within the classroom. Refraining from these sensitive issues will lead to disservice to those special need students who look to teachers and school staff as a guide to stay abreast of how to meet their needs. Therefore, having teachers who differentiate instruction will enable them to properly engage the students in their education.

Once teachers embrace special needs children and their abilities, then and only then, will they be able to help these students develop a learning style that will enable their academic levels of learning to the highest degree (Irvine, 2003). Teachers provide the strategies to assess and build these students to be productive members of society and should only want the best for every student within their classroom. Therefore, we must be reminded that each student is presented with a diverse learning skill, which holds him or her captive in this process as well.

"It is the professional responsibility to teach educators to help prospective teachers expand their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes toward people who differ from them." (Obiakor & Utley, 1997, p. 105). In order to understand students with special needs, teachers must abstain from their attitudes and biases, which hold negative connotations in the development of these students (Artiles et al., 2005).

As a result, researchers suggest that while teachers who have a cultural bias, in terms of the academic capabilities of students with special needs, will have a low expectation for some students as well (Grant, 2006). Teachers provide the strategies to

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assess and build these students to be productive members of society and should only want the best for every student within their classroom. Therefore, we must be reminded that each student is presented with a diverse learning skill, which holds him or her captive in this process as well. According to Kunjufu (2005), each student with special needs faces a learning curve when economic status plays a part in the development and skills outlined in the curriculum.

Intervention Strategies

Identifying students at risk and providing early intervention in the classroom can deter the increase of early referrals and possible placements in special education settings. Marginally, students that are not identified early and redirected, risk being classified for placement in special education settings. The significance of this study is to discuss the referral process and determine if early interventions will prevent referrals and possible placements for at risk students. Effective strategies and the support of an intervention team could decrease the number of student referrals and classifications.

To be sure, researching this topic and establishing an alternative to referrals and student placement is an effort to insure that all students succeed. When a student is struggling in the classroom, it is the teachers' responsibility to observe and document the student's academic progress. In order to address the student's problem, the teacher would have to develop a plan to facilitate the student's improvement. Teachers tend to become overwhelmed with the process of tailoring a plan for the students that are not on target within the classroom setting. An Intervention Team could establish instructional strategies and develop an individualized support needed for the students to reach their full

academic potential. The goal is to prevent early referrals and possible classifications of at risk students.

The difference between successful schools and schools that are under achieving is difficult to discern. Good schools are fully resourced with talented, caring, well-trained teachers, and with an abundance of support staff and protective and supportive administrators — and poorly performing schools are not (Hoover & Buttram, 2001). Good schools have challenging curriculum, high expectations for every student, and an expectation of success. Poor schools do not. Good schools have libraries, an adequate supply of textbooks and computers, art and music programs, and science labs. Poor schools do not.

Teachers Views of Research-Based Practices

Over the past two decades, research in special education has provided phenomenal information on techniques that would enable better classroom practice (Gersten, Vaughn, Deshler, & Shciller, 1997; Murwaski & Swanson, 2001). However, more information must be compiled to effectively provide a greater range of learning. In addition, we must use research as the tool to enabling and ensuring that methods used to increase learning is not just of the old typical decision-making made at whim by policymakers, administrators, parents, and elected school board representatives. We must objectively collaborate and use research as the tool to finding what best works for our teachers to teach.

It is very important to consider the view of the teacher, in order to understand how to sustain and implement classroom practices. We must understand the perception teachers have towards research, how effective would research be for teachers and their

educational performance with their students, and how will this research information be implemented in their professional development?

As Carnine (1997) has suggested, one way to bridge the gap is by putting research to practice and increasing the market demand for special education research. However, in order to do this, we must speak with the greatest consumers of education, and the greatest consumers of education are the teachers. By engaging teachers in conversations about research we open doors to new and improved forums that are attainable through research and development. These forums will increase the professional development of teachers and begin the improvement of educational practices.

In summary, the literature reveals how special education research communities engage in two forms of research and practice: (a) by forming communities of learners to reflect and enact changes in practices, and (b) the lack of research-based practice implementations. The objective of the ongoing research is for professional development to educate teachers in their research practice and ensure improved classroom practices.

Reliability and Validity

Validity is very important in decreasing errors that may be present from problems of measurement within the study. Validity is the degree to which accuracy of a study refers to and calculates the definite thought, or creates the measurement needed for the researcher (Creswell, Goodchild, & Turner, 1996; Thorndike, 1997). The wording of the survey aides in assessing the survey questions' relevancy to the subject matter measurement; is it reasonable to gain the information, and is it well designed. In this study, the following ethical measures were adhered to: confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, prior informed consent of participants and the principal, as well as full disclosure

of information about the research (Kvale, 1996). Evaluation reliability is not necessarily valid without factoring in a rubric to determine the scoring standards based on the elements of response that are not related to the purpose of evaluation and interpretive during scoring.

The issue of research bias, as well as the careful design of the survey instrument, and administration of the survey based on non-bias protocol, provided for the study's objective data collection process. Establishing reliability is a prerequisite for establishing validity (Creswell, 1998).

Trustworthiness then becomes the quest to produce results through qualitative research that can be trusted and are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The issue of research bias, as well as the careful design of the survey instrument, and administration of the survey based on non-bias protocol, provided for the study's research data collection process. Establishing reliability is a prerequisite for establishing validity.

The Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale is a both a valid and reliable measure that has been widely utilized in numerous research studies. The Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale proved to be a reliable and valid scale for making statistical comparisons of general and special education teachers working with students with special needs. The efficacy items accurately reflected the construct and measured what they purported to measure. Bell and Aldridge (2014) also recommended utilizing a survey as a data collection instrument, as it is consistent, reliable, and appropriate approach to data gathering.

In this study, the demographic questionnaire was useful in obtaining additional information, such as teacher age, overall years of teaching experience, and gender, which was essential for answering the research questions. The results from the focus group

interviews were used to increase the clarity and measurement precision of items on the Bandura Teacher Efficacy scale which also increases the efficacy scales validity and reliability.

Limitations of the Research

The method used for selecting participants was not the best. Taba and Noel (1957) highlighted the fact that participation should be voluntary to ensure that there is meaning to the study. For this research study, the district superintendent identified the group of teachers that she felt should be a part of the study. These pre-selected teachers were then asked to participate in the research. Due to the fact that these teachers were selected by their superintendent to participate, some teachers commented that they felt as if they did not have the option to decline to participate.

A sample size of nine teachers makes the generalizability of the research findings debatable. It also limited the amount of statistical analysis that could be performed with the quantitative data. Another limitation of this study was the participants were recruited from a small school within New Jersey. The finding of this study may only be applicable to the context of this study.

The researcher identified three significant variables that may have an effect on the outcomes of this study. The first issue is that the result of my findings will only represent a small study, limited by the number of people in my study, and will not be generalizable to other populations. The second issue is that some school districts may change the special and general education teacher's assignment. The teachers are selected based on assignment for that particular school year and if that particular teacher's assignment has changed, then the teacher would have to withdrawal from the study. The last issue would

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be teacher absenteeism. The researcher cannot control teacher attendance; this will affect the outcome of this project. Those are just a few variables that will play a big part in the researchers study.

Another limitation that I felt was my unavailability to be physically in the building more than once every two weeks. This was because I worked the same hours that CAPS was in session, and because of this work conflict, it was virtually impossible for me to be in the building more than once every two weeks or so. Even though I was available through electronic means, it was not the same as physically being present to make my observations.

Recommendations

Based on the totality of the data, professional development of special education and general education teachers should be done. Because there is a gap in the infomation/knowledge base, more research is needed on the success of students in inclusion/mainstreamed classrooms. Additionally, more research is necessary in the teacher preparation programs. An increase in special education preparation for all teachers, both general education and special education teachers, is another area for ongoing research.

Conclusion

In this action research study, I examined teachers' perception of their self-efficacy as it related to students with special needs. Both general and special education teachers were struggling to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. One of the issues that needed to be examined was how teachers were poorly equipped to instruct this population. I examined teacher performance, effective teaching strategies for students

with special needs, and the confidence of general and special education teachers. One of the greatest challenges was having the general education teacher implement effective pedagogical practices to instruct students with special needs. Unfortunately, general education teachers were not prepared to instruct students with special needs (Buford & Casey, 2012).

All teachers, especially those who instruct students with special needs, should possess the ability to be culturally sensitive and responsive to assist children from different educational backgrounds and with a variety of needs while developing beliefs and capacities to cope with school diversity. This has been proven to be a tough goal due to the stereotypical views of teaching a student with special needs. Often times, this stereotype will have a negative result with unpleasant teacher-student relationships and poor student achievement (Gibson, 2004).

Research over the last 30 years has recognized that teacher efficacy has an effect on student learning (Bandura, 1997; Guo, Justice, Sawyer, & Tompkins, 2011; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Values, attitudes, and efficacy beliefs of teachers are essential to the academic and social success of students with special needs within classrooms (Bandura, 1997). Teacher efficacy is strongly correlated to many significant educational outcomes for students (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Because there is such a disproportionate number of students classified as having special needs, it is critical to understand the relation of teacher efficacy and the educational success of students' with special needs (Delorenza, Battino, Schreiber, & Carrio, 2009). In order for teachers to effectively instruct students with special needs, it is imperative to acquire information about teachers' beliefs in terms of their capacity to

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produce change that can lead to better teacher preparation when addressing the needs of special education students (Wendling & Mather, 2009). Teachers must arrange their classrooms in a way that take into account the students' learning styles (Hobgood & Ormsby 2011).

This study has contributed to determining the impact of multiple factors on teacher efficacy beliefs and their attitudes towards instructing students with special needs, therefore adding to the literature on teacher efficacy and teaching students with special needs in general education classrooms. Furthermore, this study suggests that the administrative and school level had a modest impact on teacher efficacy and teachers' attitudes towards instructing students with special needs. Teachers must be involved in professional development that enhances their level of confidence, attitudes, beliefs, and preparedness to effectively instruct students with special needs that will ultimately promote academic and social growth for all students (Guo et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, teachers throughout the nation have both unfavorable attitudes and little confidence in teaching students with special needs in regular settings (Brownell et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that teachers are the most important factor in student learning (House & Jones, 2003). If that is so, teacher efficacy is paramount to students learning in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

Teachers/Practitioners

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. This interview will probably take about 30-45 minutes to complete. I am conducting this interview with General and Special Education teachers and Child Study Team members at Folsom Borough School District to determine the degree of teacher efficacy in meeting the needs of students with IEP's. The information from these interviews will be analyzed and should contribute to the research literature on teacher efficacy in meeting learning of students with special needs at Folsom Borough School District. This interview will be confidential. I will not identify you by name in the report or in any conversations with other people. Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at anytime.

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions
1. What is your title?

2. How long were you in this position?

3. What are your primary responsibilities?

4. How familiar are you with self-contained and inclusion classes?

5. Are you aware of any laws pertaining to special education?

Open-Ended Questions
6. What type of course did you take in your college education program? Do you implement any of these strategies in your classroom? (For both General/ Special education teachers)

7. Walk me through the general process of how you conduct your class on a daily basis? Is it different when you have special needs students? If so, how so?

8. What kind of support mechanisms do you have (in school and/or outside of school) to support you with instructing general and special education students?

9. How do you insure that all learning objectives have been met? What kinds of techniques do you use?

10. Do you feel the techniques are affective? Why or why not?

11. How do you engage students in varied experiences that meet the diverse needs and promote social, emotional & academic growth?

12. How do you incorporate the special needs student's specific academic goals on their IEP?

    How do you implement student modifications stated on their IEPs?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me in reference to your teaching of special needs students in the Folsom School District?

Bandura Teacher Efficacy Scale

BANDURA'S INSTRUMENT

TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY SCALE

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinions about each of the statements below by circling the appropriate number. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Efficacy to Influence Decision making

How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Nothing　　　Very Little　　Some Influence　　　Quite a Bit　　A Great Deal

How much can you express your views freely on important school matters?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Nothing　　　Very Little　　Some Influence　　　Quite a Bit　　A Great Deal

Efficacy to Influence School Resources

How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Nothing　　　Very Little　　Some Influence　　　Quite a Bit　　A Great Deal

Instructional Self-Efficacy

How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Nothing　　　Very Little　　Some Influence　　　Quite a Bit　　A Great Deal

How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous

lessons?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to work together?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students'

learning?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get children to do their homework?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

Disciplinary Self-Efficacy

How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on the school grounds?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

Efficacy to Enlist Parental Involvement

How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

Efficacy to Enlist Community Involvement

How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

Efficacy to Create a Positive School Climate

How much can you do to make the school a safe place?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to make the school run effectively?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to reduce school dropout?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

Nothing   Very Little   Some Influence   Quite a Bit   A Great Deal

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Protocol

<u>**Teacher Efficacy**</u>

1.   How confident do you feel in your ability to develop and implement activities to achieve desired learning outcomes in your classroom? Why?

2.   Do you feel competent/confident when it comes to teaching students with special needs? If so, why? If not, why not?

3.   What strategies do you know of/use in order to help your student reach academic goals? Are those strategies different for students with special needs? If so, how so? If not, why not?

4.   Do you believe that your education prepared you with strategies for the practical, day-to-day task of teaching students? If so, how? If not, why not? Please explain.

<u>**Differentiated Instruction**</u>

1.   Do you change your lesson plans/classroom activities to accommodate students with special needs? If so, how?

2.   What student factors do/would you use to determine how to change lesson plans and class activities to accommodate students with special needs?

3.   What are the challenges associated with changing lesson plans/classroom activities to accommodate students with special needs?

4.   What are the benefits associated with changing lesson plans/classroom activities to accommodate students with special needs?

5.   What planning tools, strategies, and resources do you utilize to assist you with accommodating students with special needs?

 6. How would you adopt your teaching style to instruct students with special needs?

7. How would you modify the curriculum to better serve the special needs population?

8. How comfortable do you feel implementing a different message of instruction to promote student growth?

Pedagogical Practices

1. Describe your teaching style?

2. What are the approaches/practices that you use while your teaching that is most effective and why?

3. If there is one area you would like to improve in your teaching, what will it be and why?

4. What pedagogical approaches do you utilize in instructing special need students?

5. How do you incorporate culturally relevant learning materials into your lesson?