A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Kristen Peterson
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/448

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

by

Kristen Peterson

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Advisor: Patricia Reeves, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2011
A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Kristen Peterson, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2011

It has become evident in recent years that it is not the placement in the general education classroom that makes the difference for the education of students with disabilities, but it is the instructional strategies used by general education teachers (King-Sears, 1997; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Zigmund, 2003; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). In the last two decades, considerable progress has been made in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective interventions for students with learning disabilities. Although the research on effective instruction is abundant, studies continue to reveal general education teachers minimally change their instruction when students with learning disabilities are present (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Schumm et al., 1995).

This qualitative phenomenological study collected data through fifteen in-depth interviews with elementary general education teachers from across Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to better understand general education teachers’ deeper perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their instructional strategies. This study found general education teachers perceive their instructional planning and strategies as meeting the needs of their students with learning disabilities. The participants did not express needing additional training, collaboration with colleagues, or assistance to plan or
provide instruction and accommodations. The participants interpreted additional staff members and volunteers as providing the most support for inclusion and parents as the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.

This study found general education teachers are open and willing to teach students with learning disabilities, but they lack an awareness of the need to improve and expand their instructional practices for teaching students with learning disabilities. The teachers in this study did not interpret or recognize their reliance on whole group instruction with little differentiation, lack of collaboration with the special education teacher, planning instruction in isolation, and absence of using student assessment data when planning instruction as barriers to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. Additional support and training is needed to further develop general education teachers’ knowledge and teaching skills in order to improve the education and inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank those who made the completion of this endeavor possible. Thank you baby Mae for your inspiration to complete this dissertation. News of your upcoming arrival gave me the focus and timeline to complete this adventure. I cannot wait to meet you and enjoy all the precious and sweet moments of motherhood with you in my arms. To my son, Josiah, thank you for all the joy and love you have brought to my life. Already at just two years old, you have such a love for learning and I look forward to putting the laptop away this summer and exploring the world outside with your energy and curiosity.

To my husband, Aaron. Thank you for making this endeavor possible. I would not be here today if it were not for you. You have helped me to develop into the person I am today through your unending support, encouragement, and love. You not only kept me well fed and managed all the household things so I could focus on this program, but you believed in me during my moments of weakness and exhaustion. When I needed encouragement, you were always there for me. Now that this adventure is behind us, I promise to get better in the kitchen.

In closing, I would like to thank my fellow cohort members for your friendship and support along the way. Thank you to the staff in the Education Department at Northern Michigan University for all your support and encouragement to pursue this endeavor. I would also like to thank the faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership and Technology at Western Michigan University for providing this
opportunity to educators in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Patricia Reeves, Dr. Walter Burt, and Dr. Sandra Imdieke, for your expertise and commitment to helping me journey from being the first in my family to attend college, to attaining this advanced degree.

Kristen Peterson
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1
   Historical Evolution of Inclusive Education ................................................................. 1
   Mainstreaming .............................................................................................................. 2
   Regular Education Initiative ....................................................................................... 3
   Inclusion ....................................................................................................................... 4
   Instructional Strategies for Inclusion .......................................................................... 8
   General Education Teacher ....................................................................................... 10

Overview of the Study ...................................................................................................... 11
   Purpose and Problem Statement .............................................................................. 11
   Research Questions .................................................................................................... 12
   Significance of Study ................................................................................................. 13
   Methodology ............................................................................................................... 14
   Limitations and Delimitations .................................................................................... 16

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 16
   Definition of Terms ..................................................................................................... 17

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................... 19
   Historical Evolution of Inclusive Education ............................................................. 19

   Exclusion of Students with Disabilities .................................................................. 20
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Court Decisions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education of All Handicapped Children Act</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Reject</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Education Program</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Permission</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Restrictive Environment</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstreaming</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Education Initiative</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Inclusion</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuum of Services Arguments</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion on Inclusion Literature</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Strategies for Inclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Development Theories</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Teaching Practices</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Directed Instruction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Instruction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Instruction</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Collaboration................................................................................... 52
Co-Teaching............................................................................... 53
Instructional Grouping............................................................... 55
Cooperative Learning............................................................... 55
Peer Tutoring........................................................................ 56
Small Group Instruction............................................................ 57
Conclusion on Instruction Literature............................................. 59
The General Education Teacher.................................................... 59
Teacher Preparation .................................................................. 60
Barriers to Inclusion................................................................. 61
Lack of Effective Instruction....................................................... 62
Conclusion of the Literature Review............................................. 65

III. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................ 67
Research Questions...................................................................... 67
Study Methodology...................................................................... 68
Study Methods and Procedures................................................... 70
Semi-Structured Interviews......................................................... 70
Role of the Researcher............................................................... 72
Self-Disclosure.......................................................................... 73
Sampling...................................................................................... 74
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Ethics ........................................................................................................ 76
Data Analysis .......................................................................................... 76
Organizing the Data ........................................................................... 77
Immersion in the Data .................................................................. 77
Generating Themes and Categories ............................................ 78
Coding the Data ............................................................................ 78
Writing Analytic Memos ............................................................. 78
Offering Interpretations ............................................................... 79
Searching for Alternate Understandings ................................... 79
Validating the Accuracy of the Findings .................................. 79
  Credibility ........................................................................... 79
  Transferability .................................................................... 80
  Conformability ................................................................... 81
  Authenticity ........................................................................ 81
Limitations and Delimitations .................................................. 81
Conclusion ..................................................................................... 82

IV. RESULTS ............................................................................................. 83

Sample Selection ........................................................................ 83
Analysis of the Data .................................................................. 85
Findings ....................................................................................... 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Accommodations</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response Accommodations</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened Assignments</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Expectations</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Accommodations</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction Planning</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Instructional Methods</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Student Attention</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End in Sight</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Practices</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Style Instruction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Instruction</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group Instruction</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Instruction</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Student Response</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 4</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Inclusion</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Barriers</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Support</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Members</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER

Volunteers ............................................................. 145

Conclusion .......................................................... 147

Research Question 5 ............................................. 147

Research Question 1 ............................................. 148

Research Question 2 ............................................. 150

Research Question 3 ............................................. 151

Research Question 4 ............................................. 152

Conclusion .......................................................... 155

Summary of the Findings .......................................... 156

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .......................... 159

Purpose and Methodology ..................................... 159

Review of the Research Questions .......................... 161

Research Question 1 ............................................. 161

Research Question 2 ............................................. 164

Research Question 3 ............................................. 167

Research Question 4 ............................................. 170

Conclusions .......................................................... 172

Importance of Study ............................................. 173

Perspectives of the Participants ............................. 174

Instructional Strategies for Inclusion ....................... 176
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Acceptance of Students with Learning Disabilities .......... 176
Accommodations ............................................................... 177
Supports to Inclusion ....................................................... 178
Barriers to Inclusion ......................................................... 178
Conclusion on Participants’ Interpretations ....................... 179
Researchers Interpretations and Findings from Study .......... 180
Instruction Planning ......................................................... 182
Accommodations ............................................................... 182
Instructional Strategies ...................................................... 183
Support ................................................................. 184
Barriers ................................................................. 185
Areas for Future Training and Development .................... 186
Recommendations for Further Studies ............................. 188
REFERENCES ................................................................. 189

APPENDICES

A. Consent Form ............................................................... 212
B. Study Invitation ............................................................ 215
C. Interview Outline .......................................................... 218
D. Conceptual Framework ................................................ 220
E. Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter 222
## LIST OF TABLES

1. Demographics of Participants ................................................................. 85
2. Themes from Data Analysis ................................................................. 87
3. Classroom Accommodations ................................................................. 90
4. Participant Response to Students with Learning Disabilities in the Classroom ................................................................. 106
5. Factors Described by Participants when Planning Instruction .......... 107
6. Instructional Practices Described by Participants ................................. 115
7. Barriers to Inclusion ............................................................................ 132
8. Supports for Inclusion ........................................................................... 140
9. Participant Responses to the Themes of this Study by the Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 148
10. Participant Responses to Students with Learning Disabilities in their Classroom by Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 149
11. Instruction Planning by Special Education Population of Schools ........ 150
12. Factors Described by Participants when Planning Instruction by Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 151
13. Instructional Practices Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 153
14. Barriers to Inclusion Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 154
15. Supports to Inclusion Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools ................................................................. 155
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the evolution of inclusion with emphasis on the general education teacher and instruction in the general education classroom. The intent of this study was to explore and analyze how general education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies that they use in their inclusive classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. The supports and barriers teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities were also examined. This chapter will give a brief overview of the historical evolution of inclusive education, discuss the instructional strategies for inclusion, and review general education teachers’ preparation for inclusion. An overview of the study’s research questions, methodology, limitations, and definitions of terms will also be discussed.

Historical Evolution of Inclusive Education

Maximizing the participation of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been a continuous theme in the field of education for the past three decades (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). Since the passing of Public Law (PL) 94-142 in 1975, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), more students with disabilities are educated in the general education setting. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) gave every child with a disability, even those formerly excluded from school, the right to a free and appropriate public education (Hogan & Haggard, 1999). Before EAHCA, students with disabilities often did not have
a choice, but were assigned to special day schools, residential institutions, or self-contained classrooms. In most situations, students with disabilities were separated from their nondisabled peers (deBettencourt, Vallecorsa & Zigmond, 2000).

Mainstreaming

When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) became law, it mandated that all students with disabilities be provided educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE meant that children with disabilities were to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate. To meet the LRE mandate, a practice called mainstreaming was implemented. With mainstreaming, students received part of their education in the regular education classroom and were 'pulled-out' into a resource room to receive their special education services (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004). (An in-depth description of special education terms is located at the end of this Chapter).

Although well intended, some studies found mainstreaming had a number of negative effects on children. Sometimes students were stigmatized when placed in special education placements that separated them from their normally achieving classmates (Will, 1986). Another problem with mainstreaming was the emphasis on failure rather than prevention. In most cases, students with disabilities had to fail in the general education classroom before they would qualify for special education services. Due to being identified only after developing serious learning problems, students with disabilities sometimes made little growth in the special education class (Reynolds & Wang, 1983). Furthermore, through the use of mainstreaming, came the attitude that
students with disabilities really belonged to the special education teacher and students with disabilities only “visited” the regular education classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

**Regular Education Initiative**

Due to some of the problems with mainstreaming, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) emerged in the 1980s. The Regular Education Initiative went further than mainstreaming and recommended fundamental revisions in where and how students with disabilities received special education services. The premise of the REI was students with disabilities could be serviced more effectively through the general education classroom than through the special education system (Lerner, 2000; Wang, Reynolds & Walberg, 1986). Advocates of the REI (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986) called for a more fully integrated educational experience for students with disabilities and criticized the divided and fragmented education services being provided to students with disabilities. Supporters of the REI urged special education and general education teachers to work together to educate all students (Friend, 2005).

Since 1975, the federal special education law, PL 94-142, has been reauthorized numerous times and with each reauthorization, services for students with disabilities have continued to expand. In 1990, amendments changed the law to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and added more disability categories. New IDEA amendments in 1997 stated that the general education setting is the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the majority of students with disabilities, and educators must justify any instance in which a student with a disability is not educated there (Friend,
Students can be removed from the regular education environment only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved (deBettencourt, Vallecorsa & Zigmond, 2000).

Inclusion

By the end of the 1980s, the concept of Regular Education Initiative culminated into a movement toward inclusive schools or inclusion. Educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom is now often referred to as inclusion, or inclusive education. Although the terms regular education initiative and mainstreaming still exist, most educators and professionals use the term, inclusion. Inclusion is not a legal term and the word appears nowhere in the federal legislation governing the education of students with disabilities.

Inclusion is a philosophy of service delivery for special education students. Cooper and Sayeski (2005) describe inclusion as the belief that individuals with disabilities are a part of society and therefore should be included in all aspects of society. Friend and Pope (2005) define inclusion as the understanding that all students, such as gifted students, average learners, and those students who struggle should be fully welcomed members of their school communities and that all professionals in a school share responsibility for their learning. The philosophical ideas of inclusion are the normalization of children through integrated general education classes and the elimination of labels for students with disabilities (Lerner, 2000). York, Doyle, and Kronberg (1992) describe inclusion as a value to live by where inclusive communities are
ones where everyone is valued and where members work together to support each other to maximize individual potential.

Inclusion is also a term that has many different interpretations. One interpretation of inclusion is placing all students from all categories of disabilities and all degrees of severity into the regular education classroom, which is referred to as full inclusion (Lerner, 2000). Proponents of full inclusion claim that a merged system where individualized adaptations and supports are made available to all children in general education will be better for meeting the needs of all children (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Lilly, 1988; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) call for the joining of effective practices from special and regular education to establish a general education system that is more inclusive and better serves all children.

Supporters of full inclusion maintain there are many social and academic benefits for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Often students with disabilities in inclusive programs feel less stigmatized, are better liked and accepted, and have more positive self-perceptions, than students in special education classes (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1996). Through inclusion, general education teachers take more responsibility for students with disabilities instead of sending them to resource rooms. Stainback and Stainback (1992) propose students with disabilities enjoy increased instruction time due to inclusion, because students are no longer traveling to the resource room for instruction and missing key content in the general education classroom. Studies have found that students with learning disabilities can be supported in the general education settings for the entire school day with academic achievement at
least as high, if not higher than those achieved in separate class settings (Banerji & Daily, 1995; Bear & Proctor, 1990; Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990; Waldron, 1994).

Many professionals in the literature express concerns about whether full inclusion is appropriate for all students with disabilities and emphasize the importance of maintaining a continuum of services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kaufman, 1993; Kauffman & Mock, 2002; Roberts & Mather, 1995; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Zigmond, 2003). Supporters for a continuum of services for students with disabilities cite two main reasons. First, they believe there is an inadequate research base to advocate such a drastic change to the current educational system (Kaufman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Lieberman, 1985; Messinger, 1985; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989). Zigmond (2003) believes, “the research evidence on the relative efficacy of one special education service delivery model over another is scarce, methodologically flawed, and inconclusive” (p. 194). Some studies support positive trends with inclusion programs (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994/1995; Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Bear & Proctor, 1990), however others have reported disappointing or unsatisfactory academic and social achievement through inclusion models (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Zigmond & Baker, 1990; Zigmond et al., 1995).

Secondly, many students with learning disabilities need individualized teaching and explicit instruction, which some professionals believe is extremely complex and difficult to provide in the general education classroom (Zigmond, 1995, 1997). Advocates of a continuum of services believe inclusion ignores the notion of individual planning and that students with disabilities need more intensive instruction then can be provided in a general classroom (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Roberts & Mather, 1995).
Full inclusion threatens the varied and intense service delivery options that advocates have spent years obtaining for students with disabilities (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). The availability of a continuum of services has been mandated in the law since 1975 and reflects the wishes of many parents, educators, and legislators and the loss of these service options would violate the civil rights of students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995).

The different inclusion philosophies have overwhelmingly been disputed and discussed by leading researchers in the field through numerous books, journals, and position papers. It is evident that a division still exists between supporters of full inclusion (Lily, 1986; McLeskey & Pugach, 1995; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Thousand & Villa, 1991; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996; Will, 1986) and supporters for inclusion with a continuum of services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Leiberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985; Roberts & Mather, 1995; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989; Zigmond & Baker, 1995).

The research on special education placement spans more than three decades and provides no compelling research evidence that place is the critical factor in the academic or social progress of students with mild or moderate disabilities (Zigmond, 2003). No intervention eliminates the impact of having a disability and there is not one placement or program model that is effective for all students with disabilities. The placement or setting is not a treatment, but it is what goes on in that setting for student with disabilities that is important (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Zigmond, 1997). The one thing that makes the difference for students with disabilities is the level and quality of instruction (Zigmond, 2003). It is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the
instructional strategies used by the general education teacher that makes the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (King-Sears, 1997; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Zigmond, 2003; Zigmond & Baker, 1995).

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). For the first time ever, IDEIA changed how students with learning disabilities are identified for special education services by adding a response to intervention (RTI) component in the law. Before qualifying for special education services, school districts have to ensure that the students’ learning difficulties are not due to a lack of adequate instruction in reading or math. With RTI teachers are responsible for providing appropriate instruction using scientifically based interventions in the general education classroom. This new provision in the law added greater accountability for general education teachers and the instructional strategies they use when teaching students with disabilities (Friend, 2005).

*Instructional Strategies for Inclusion*

In the last two decades, considerable progress had been made in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective interventions for students with learning disabilities (Gersten, 1998). A number of studies have focused specifically on the best instructional strategies for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Kame’enui & Simmons, 1999; King-Sears, 1997; King-Sears & Cummings, 1996; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997; Schmidt, Rozendal, & Greeman, 2002; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). In addition, several meta-analyses and research syntheses studies regarding intervention strategies for students with learning disabilities were completed with support from the
U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, which have further added to the body of literature on effective instruction for students with disabilities (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 1999; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Gersten, Williams, & Fuchs, 2001; Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998).

After reviewing this comprehensive body of literature regarding the instruction of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, a number of instructional themes emerged. These instructional themes for inclusion will be described and examined thoroughly in Chapter II in order to develop a lens through which to view this study through. These themes include: teacher directed instruction, instructional grouping, and collaboration.

The key to success for students with disabilities in the general education classrooms is the general education teacher (Keogh, 1990). Despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities, numerous researchers and practitioners have found that few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers (Malouf & Schiller, 1995; Vergason & Andergg, 1991). Individualized instruction typically does not occur in the general education classroom (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993; Zigmoid et al., 1995; Zigmoid & Baker, 1994;) and many teachers make few or no adaptations for students with disabilities (Baker & Zigmoid, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Samuell, 1995). Regular education tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed to teach to the “average” student instead of a wide range of students with
diverse backgrounds and characteristics (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). General education teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

General Education Teacher

A major problem with the inclusion movement is the limited attention devoted to planning and preparing general education teachers for inclusion (Simpson and Myles, 1990). Numerous studies have found that regular education teachers perceive themselves to be unprepared to teach children with disabilities (deBrettencourt, 1999; Salvia & Munson, 1986; Schumm & Vaughn, 1991, 1995; Welch, 1996). Most states require general education teachers to take only one introductory course in special education in order to receive a teaching degree (Peterson & Beloin, 1998). Usually, this course provides an overview on the different disabilities, but lacks in teaching a variety of instructional strategies for teaching students with disabilities (Reiff, Evans, & Cass, 1991).

Scruggs and Mastropieri’s (1996) investigation of general education teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion and mainstreaming, found teachers have voiced concerns over the years about quality of teacher preparation programs in addressing the needs of students placed in their classroom. General education teachers have also expressed a need for expanded sources of support, reduced class size, and ongoing training in serving students with disabilities. From their research, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) developed a list of general education teachers’ needs: (a) more time to plan for students with disabilities; (b) systematic, intensive training; (c) more personnel in classroom; (d)
additional curriculum materials and equipment; and (e) class sizes of fewer than 20 students.

Many researches believe a lack of teachers prepared to provide quality inclusive services to students with disabilities is one of the primary barriers to serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Evans, Townsend, & Duchnowski, 1996; King-Sears, 1995) Proponents of inclusion have advocated for drastic changes in the responsibilities of general education teachers without seeing if general education teachers are prepared or if they support teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991).

Overview of the Study

Purpose and Problem Statement

For thirty years the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has been a controversial issue in the public schools. Despite numerous studies over the past three decades, the literature on the effectiveness of full inclusion versus pullout special education programs is inconclusive. The practice of inclusion continues to grow in the public schools despite teachers’ lack of preparation, training, and support for inclusion. Recently, it has become evident that it is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the instructional strategies used by the general education teacher that makes the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (King-Sears, 1997; Vaughn & Schumm 1995; Zigmond, 2003; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). Even with an abundant amount of effective instructional
strategies in the literature, studies continue to find that teachers minimally change their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Schumm et al., 1995).

It is evident research based instructional methods are important to the success of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, but we have not extensively explored or studied general education teachers’ perspectives and experiences with incorporating these instructional practices into their regular classroom instruction. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have revealed there is a gap between the research on effective instruction and actual classroom practice, but few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. We know very little about how general education teachers adapt the ways they plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. This study responded to this gap in the literature by exploring how general education teachers describe their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities. This study also investigated what supports and barriers general education teachers describe when planning and implementing instruction for students with disabilities.

Research Questions

Few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Very little is known about what effective instructional strategies general education teachers use or
how they plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms.

This study examined these issues through the following research questions:

1. How do general education teachers describe how they respond to having special education students in their classroom?

2. How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for all their students? How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for special education students?

3. What specific instructional strategies do general education teachers describe as their means of addressing the needs of students in their classrooms? How do general education teachers describe the way special education students respond to those instructional strategies?

4. What supports and barriers do general education teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities?

5. Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a high percentage of special education students? Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a low percentage of special education students?

Significance of Study

As inclusion continues to grow in the public schools, ways to make the educational experience more meaningful and successful for students with disabilities must be studied. The significance of this study is clearly validated in light of recent federal legislation. Due to NCLB, teachers are now held accountable for the education of students with disabilities in their classroom like never before. No longer are students
with disabilities just visiting the general education classroom. NCLB requires that all children be tested in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math and schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress.

Also, the reauthorization of IDEIA stresses the use of scientific based interventions in the general education classroom to ensure students’ learning difficulties are not due to a lack of adequate instruction, but studies continue to report that general education teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). It is important to better understand the phenomenon of teaching and planning instruction for students with disabilities from the general education teachers’ perspective in order to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Methodology

This study investigated the deeper perspectives of general education teachers through face-to-face interactions (Newton & Rudestram, 2001) using a qualitative research design. In qualitative research, the researcher learns from participants to understand the meaning of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and it seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience (Newton & Rudestam, 2001). There are several different ways to perform qualitative research. The method used for this study was phenomenological, where the actual experiences of general education teachers about the phenomenon, instruction for students with disabilities, was examined in detail in order to obtain a description of the “essence” of teaching in inclusive classrooms (Creswell, 2003). The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the
experiences of general education teachers and how they view and interpret their instructional strategies when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

This study collected data using semi-structured interviews to better understand general education teachers’ deeper perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their instructional strategies (Rudestram & Newton, 2001). Interview questions were open-ended and defined the area explored. Purposive criterion sampling was employed in order to interview teachers who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information. The researcher was specifically interested in studying elementary education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms in the public school system in the state of Michigan. Teachers who teach in special classrooms, such as music, art, library, technology, or physical education were not included in this study. Inclusive classrooms in this study were defined as classrooms that include special education and regular education students.

The sampling method employed was purposeful and also what Patton (1990) calls extreme or deviant case sampling. Deviant case sampling focuses on cases that are rich in information, because they are unusual or special in some way (Patton, 1990). The researcher selected nine participants from schools with high special education populations and six participants from schools with low special education populations. The researcher was interested in this sample in order to explore and compare the themes that develop between schools with differing special education populations.
Limitations and Delimitations

Patton (2005) reminds us that there are no perfect research designs. There are always trade offs. At the beginning of a study it is sometimes difficult to identify weaknesses (Creswell, 2003), especially in a qualitative study, because qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. The perspectives reflected in this study are those of the teachers interviewed by the researcher. A limitation in this study is that the findings could be subject to other interpretations. Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. Even though the participant sample size is appropriate for this study, it is not large enough to generalize the study to the general population. Lastly, the researcher interviewed teachers from the State of Michigan. As a result, the physical boundaries and cultural differences that may exist in other locations prelude the results from being generalized to other regions.

Summary

This qualitative study will be presented in five chapters. Chapter I included an overview of the topic, problem and purpose statement, research questions, significance of the study, methodology overview, and delimitations and limitations. Next, Chapter II will review the current literature involving the historical evolution of inclusion, teacher preparation, and effective instructional practices for inclusion. Chapter III will provide a detailed description of the methodology of the study. Chapter IV will summarize the data collected. Lastly, Chapter V will present the conclusions of this study as well as the recommendations for future research.
Definition of Terms

**Disability.** A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits or restricts the condition, manner, or duration under which an average person in the population can perform a major life activity, such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, or taking care of oneself (Friend, 2005).

**Education of the Handicapped Act.** Enacted in 1975 and was the first act to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities. The act was later renamed Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is currently called Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDIEA) (Friend, 2005).

**Inclusion.** The practice of educating all or most children in the same classroom, including children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities (Friend, 2005).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** A federal law, first enacted in 1975, that promotes the educational rights of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (Friend, 2005).

**General education teacher.** A professional who teaches regular education and special education students together in the general education classroom. Also, sometimes called regular education teacher (Friend, 2005).

**Least restrictive environment (LRE).** A principle in the IDEA legislation that states children with disabilities should have the opportunity to be educated to the maximum extent possible with their nondisabled peers (Friend, 2005).

**Learning disabilities.** A disability in which students have average to above average intelligences, but experience significant problems in learning how to read, write
or compute math problems. It is the most common disability serviced under IDEA (Friend, 2005).

**No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).** A 2001 federal school reform legislation that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. NCLB includes increased school accountability for student learning, more choices for parents and students, greater flexibility for schools in the use of funds, and an emphasis on early reading intervention (Friend, 2005).

**Regular education students.** Students in the general education classroom that do not have a disability.

**Resource room.** A name sometimes given to the special education classroom.

**Special education.** Specialized instruction that students with disabilities are entitled to receive as articulated in IDEA.

**Special education teacher.** Professional who provides day-to-day instruction and other support for students with disabilities.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

No problem in education exists in isolation from other human behavior. There is always some research or theory that can be reviewed to inform a study (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the relevant literature regarding the pertinent aspects of this study. The first section, historical evolution of inclusive education, reviews the legislation and laws that have shaped education for student with disabilities in the United States. The next section, instructional strategies for inclusion, examines the literature regarding the best practices for teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The last section, the general education teacher, discusses teachers’ preparation, support, and barriers to inclusion. The review of the literature builds a logical framework for this study and locates it within a tradition of inquiry and a context of related studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The conceptual framework that guides this study can be found in Appendix D.

Historical Evolution of Inclusive Education

The literature review on the historical evolution of inclusive education reviews the exclusion and treatment of students with disabilities from the public schools. Next, the social and political factors that contributed to the growth of services for students with disabilities is reviewed, followed by an overview of the landmark court cases and federal legislation that expanded the education of students with disabilities. Lastly, the historical
evolution of inclusive education leads into a discussion on the differing philosophies of how to educate students with learning disabilities.

*Exclusion of Students with Disabilities*

The history of students with disabilities in the public school system of the United States is one more of exclusion than inclusion. Although some attempts were made to educate students with disabilities by parents, physicians, and researchers through asylums and government or church supported institutions in the 1800s, most children with disabilities did not receive an education. Students who did not meet “minimum standards” were often turned away from many school districts. Parents of children with disabilities often had few options. Parents could keep their children at home, place them in expensive, private residential facilities, or consign them to large, public custodial institutions (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

Even with the passing of compulsory attendance laws in the early 1900s, many students with disabilities continued to be excluded from the public schools (Stainback & Stainback, 1996) with help from the state courts. In 1893, Massachusetts State Supreme court in Watson v. City of Cambridge ruled that a child who was “weak in mind” could not benefit from instruction, was troublesome to other children, and could be expelled from public school. When school officials claimed that a particular student with disabilities required too much teacher time and negatively affected school discipline, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled school officials could exclude the student (Beattie v. Board of Education, 1919). As recent as 1958, the Supreme Court of Illinois, in Department of Public Welfare v. Hass, held that the state’s compulsory attendance laws
did not require the state to provide a free and public education for the “feeble minded” or to children who were “mentally deficient” (Yell, 2006).

Although, some public school systems did design special programs for students with mild to moderate disabilities, the rationale of the special programs were not always in the best interest of students with disabilities. Relieving the general education teacher of children who were considered a burden due to their learning or behavior problems was often the main purpose of the special programs. Frequently, students with disabilities in special programs were isolated from their peers in different classrooms or school buildings, always separated from the general education classroom. Instead of teaching the school curriculum, the special programs were often designed to protect and nurture students with disabilities who were considered susceptible to failure in schoolwork and teasing from classmates (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

By the 1950s, special classes in the public schools became common for most students with mild disabilities, but residential institutions and special schools remained the norm for educating students who were blind, deaf, and physically disabled. Students with severe or profound developmental disabilities were generally still denied any educational services and usually lived their entire lives in large state institutions (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). Special education classrooms in the public schools were often overcrowded and located in less than ideal spaces of school buildings such as basements, storage rooms, and boiler rooms. The curriculum taught in the special classes often focused more on social development and the basic skills needed to hold a routine, low-skilled job (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).
It is important to note during this time of segregated education, general and special education teachers also developed on “parallel rather than converging lines” (Stainback & Stainback, 1996, p.20). Teachers in general education classrooms often assumed special education teachers had special preparation or a special capacity for working with students with disabilities. Teaching special education was perceived to be totally different than teaching general education. Many in the field of education believed it was inappropriate to expect general education teachers who lacked preparation to educate students in wheelchairs or students with learning difficulties (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). Most educators believed separate classes were beneficial to students with disabilities, because smaller class sizes allowed for more individualized instruction and improved the self-esteem of students with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). Unfortunately, this separateness between special education and general education continued to be a reoccurring theme in the historical evolution of inclusive education for students with disabilities.

*Early Court Decisions*

The shift in philosophy of educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom can be traced to the landmark case, Brown v. Board of Education. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court in Brown challenged the practice of segregating students according to race and ruled that separate is not equal. The U.S. Supreme Court declared education must be made available to all children on equal terms. This constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law, found in the Fourteenth Amendment was central to Brown. Under the Fourteenth Amendment, states may not
deny any person within their jurisdiction equal protection under the law. If states provide an education to their citizens, then they must do so for all their citizens. Although the Supreme Court did not mention students with disabilities, the precedents set in Brown led to extensive changes in school policies for students with disabilities (Yell, 2006).

For the decade following Brown v. Board of Education professionals began questioning the practice of separate classes for students with disabilities. Researchers explored this issue in a collection of studies referred to as the efficacy studies. Studies compared the achievement and social adjustment of students with cognitive disabilities who were in special classes to students with cognitive disabilities who remained in general education settings. The studies found students with mental retardation in the general education classroom made more progress academically than those in special classes (Goldsteing, Moss & Jordan, 1965). It was proposed the students’ academic achievement was probably higher because they were learning the same curriculum as the general education students. Often in special classes, more emphasis was on job-related skills than on academics (Friend, 2005).

By the mid-1960s with the civil right movement going strong, many advocates and researchers began to challenge the education programs for students with disabilities. In 1968, Lloyd Dunn, an influential researcher, wrote a turning point essay, “Special Education for the Mildly Retarded: Is Much of It Justifiable?” Dunn (1968) questioned whether separate classes provided an adequate education for students with disabilities. Dunn challenged teachers to use new technology and research on effective teaching to educate students along with their peers in the general education classroom (Friend, 2005). Other researchers began studying the stigmatizing effects of labels (Goffman, 1963;
Hobbs, 1975) and questioned the overindentification in special education of students from nondominant races or cultures (Mercer, 1973). At this time, it appeared special education programs were not a means for helping children with disabilities, but had become a means of discriminating against students who were perceived by educators as difficult to teach (Friend, 2005).

Tireless efforts from parents and advocacy groups helped to push the disability movement across the country. Parents of students with disabilities began to band together due to appalling conditions and the increasing exclusion of their children in the public schools (Yell, 2006). These parents wanted to know why their children could not be educated in the public schools. Instead parents often had to keep their children at home, put them in institutions, or send them to private agencies for schooling (Friend, 2005). By the 1950s, the first national parent advocacy groups emerged. Some of these first advocacy groups included: the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Association of Retarded Citizens, the National Society for Autistic Children, the National Association for Down Syndrome, and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities. These organizations provided support for parents and challenged state and federal governments in the courts to establish legislation that mandated free and appropriate education for all students with disabilities (Yell, 2006).

Sixteen years after the Brown decision, the idea of equal opportunity was applied to children with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities began to win landmark court cases on their children’s behalf (Friend, 2005). The first milestone case, Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1972, ruled that children with mental retardation could benefit from
education tailored to their needs. Parents won the guarantee that their children with disabilities could not be denied access to public schools, and that students with disabilities were entitled to a free public education (Friend, 2005). The second landmark court case, Mills v. Board of Education in 1972 was a class action lawsuit on behalf of 18,000 students with disabilities in the Washington D.C., schools who were denied or excluded from public education. The court ordered the district to educate all students with disabilities.

The PARC and Mills court decisions set precedent for similar cases to be filed across the country, but even with judicial success, students with disabilities continued to be denied an appropriate and free public education. School districts argued insufficient funds, untrained teachers, inadequate facilities, and instructional materials as reasons for denying education to students with disabilities (Yell, 2006). By the early 1970s, most states had passed laws requiring students with disabilities to receive a public education, however, the laws varied substantially and resulted in uneven attempts to provide education to students with disabilities, therefore, federal involvement was necessary (Yell, 2006).

Legislation

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Congress stepped in with federal legislation to improve the education of students with disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (P.L. 89-750) was the first federal law that addressed the education of children with disabilities. The law provided funding to states to help them in creating and improving programs and services for children with disabilities. In 1973,
Congress passed P.L. 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A short provision of this act, Section 504, was the first civil rights law to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The main purpose of Section 504 was to prohibit discrimination against persons with a disability by any agency receiving federal funds (Yell, 2006). In 1974, Congress passed amendments to ESEA (P.L. 93-380) that suggested educational services for students with disabilities be provided in the least-restricted environment (LRE) and established a goal of providing full educational opportunities for all children with disabilities within each state. Unfortunately, each state was able to set their own timeline for implementing the law’s provisions and changes were suggested instead of mandated (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

**Education of All Handicapped Children Act**

The most significant piece of legislation that expanded the rights for students with disabilities was the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which is often referred to as P.L. 94-142 (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000). In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act tackled many of the issues that were being addressed in the courts and mandated that states follow the law in order to receive federal funding (Yell, 2006). The basic principles in the law are still in force today and are essential to special education. In the next few paragraphs, the principles of this law, which relate to the focus of this study will be reviewed.
Zero Reject

The law stated a free and appropriate public education must be provided to all children with disabilities regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. Districts are required to enroll every child and cannot exclude any child with a disability from school.

Individualized Education Program

Every child receiving special education must have a written, individualized education program (IEP) that includes assessment of the student’s current educational performance, annual goals, and short-term instructional objectives, provisions of educational services, and procedures for evaluating progress toward objectives.

Parental Permission

P.L. 94-142 increased the involvement of parents in the education of students with disabilities. Parents are entitled to notice, consultation, and hearings about their child’s special education services. All parents must be given opportunities to participate in and present complaints about their child’s identification, evaluation, placement, and IEP (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

Least Restrictive Environment

Under P.L. 94-142, all students are entitled to be educated in the setting most like the general education to the extent they can succeed and school districts must provide a continuum of services. For example, starting with the least restrictive placement, a
continuum of services includes: the general education classroom, next the general education classroom with pullout special education services in a resource room for part of the day, and then lastly a separate special education classroom or a separate school as being the most restrictive placement. Any of these placement options may be considered the LRE for an individual student.

In the 1950s and 1960s most students with mild disabilities were educated in self-contained classrooms separate from their nondisabled peers. The LRE provision in P.L. 94-142 was designed to protect against the indiscriminate placement of children with disabilities in a separate settings solely because of the students’ disability and not because of the students’ learning needs (H. Rept. No. 94-332). The LRE provision in P.L. 94-142 was central to the law and with it Congress recognized the value of educating students with disabilities alongside nondisabled peers and recommended that it be done to the maximum extent appropriate. The regulations in the law required districts to make every effort for students already placed in more restrictive settings to move up the continuum toward the general education classroom as soon as it was appropriate. The appropriate placement of a student with a disability was to be decided by the child’s parents and school personnel at an IEP meeting (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

**Mainstreaming**

To meet the LRE mandate, a practice called mainstreaming was implemented. With mainstreaming, students received part of their education in the regular education classroom and were “pulled-out” into a resource room to receive their special education services (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004). In most situations, the purpose of
mainstreaming was usually social and not academic for students with severe disabilities (Friend, 2005), so often general education teachers did not change their instructional strategies when students with disabilities were in their classrooms. Through the use of mainstreaming, came the attitude that students with disabilities really belonged to the special education teacher and students with disabilities only “visited” the regular education classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

Although well intended, mainstreaming had some negative effects on children. Foster, Ysseldyke and Resse (1975) found a social stigma attached to students who were segregated from the general education classroom. In two ethnographic studies of high school students with mild disabilities, researchers found students in special education classes received watered-down content instruction that was seriously limited in substance (Miller, Leinhardt & Zigmond, 1988; Zigmond & Miller, 1992). Partanen (1993) found special education classes were slower paced with explicit instruction, but also had substantially lower cognitive demand than the general education classroom.

*Regular Education Initiative*

Due to some of the problems with mainstreaming, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) emerged in the 1980s. The Regular Education Initiative went further than mainstreaming and recommended fundamental revisions in where and how students with disabilities received special education services. The premise of the REI was the idea that students with disabilities can be serviced more effectively through the general education classroom than through the special education system (Lilly, 1986; Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987). Advocates of the REI (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986) called for a
more fully integrated educational experience for students with disabilities and criticized the divided and fragmented education services being provided to students with mild disabilities assigned to pull out special education services. Furthermore, REI supporters proposed that all students with mild disabilities should be returned to the general education classroom and any special education services that are needed should be provided in the general education classroom. Supporters of REI proposed that regular education programs could serve the needs of all students, regardless of the type or range of disability (Wang, 1987). Additionally, there was the belief that good teachers could teach all students (Gartner & Lipsky, 1989). Special education and general education teachers were recommended to work together to educate all students (Friend, 2005).

During this time, Madeline Will (1986), the Assistant Secretary of Education and head of the Office of Special Education Programs, was the leading advocate for the REI. Will (1986) argued pullout approaches were well intended, but failed in many ways to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Often students were stigmatized when placed in special education placements that separated them from their normally achieving classmates (Will, 1986). Additionally, with the pullout programs, most special education students were usually identified for special education services only after developing serious learning problems, therefore, little emphasis was placed on early intervention in the general education classroom. Will (1986) stressed that the intent of REI was to serve students with many types of mild problems: special education students, at-risk students, students with limited English, students in poverty, and others in the general education classroom.
The REI sparked a great deal of debate and discussion between leading education researchers through position papers, speeches, books, and articles. For some (Lilly, 1986; Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986), the REI became a call for a merger of special and general education and a return of special education students full-time to the general education classroom. For these advocates, the REI was a civil-rights movement, a demand for equal access to an inclusive education for students with mild disabilities and a challenge to any kind of segregation. Proponents advocated for the joining of effective practices from special and general education to establish a general education system that is more inclusive and better serves all students (Vallecorsa, deBettencourt & Zigmond, 2000).

For other professionals, the REI was simply a means for a reassessment of the division of responsibilities between general and special education. Many researchers were reluctant to abandon pullout special education entirely (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Leiberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985; Zigmond & Baker, 1995), but agreed on the need to increase the involvement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Instead these researchers called for a better alignment of special education and general education programs to achieve better academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

Opponents of the REI criticized its rapid embrace and the lack of research to support it (Kauffman & Pullen, 1989; Lieberman, 1985). They pointed to significant flaws in the research regarding placing children with disabilities in the regular education classroom (Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd & Bryan, 1988; Wang & Baker, 1986) and maintained that little empirical evidence supported the practice of educating special
education students in the general education classroom (Fuch & Fuch, 1988; Hallahan et. al., 1988).

**IDEA**

Additional federal legislation also supported the increase of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Since 1975, the federal special education law, PL 94-142, has been reauthorized numerous times and with each reauthorization, services for students with disabilities have continued to expand. In 1990, amendments changed the law to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and added more disability categories. New IDEA amendments in 1997 stated that the general education setting is the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the majority of students with disabilities, and educators must justify any instance in which a student with a disability is not educated there (Friend, 2005). Students can be removed from the regular education environment only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved (deBettencourt, Vallecorsa & Zigmond, 2000).

**Inclusion**

By the end of the 1980s, the concepts of the Regular Education Initiative culminated into a movement toward inclusive schools or inclusion. Educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom is now often referred to as inclusion, or inclusive education. Although the terms, regular education initiative and mainstreaming, still exist, most educators and professionals use the term, inclusion.
Inclusion is not a legal term and the term appears nowhere in the federal legislation governing the education of students with disabilities.

Inclusion is a philosophy of service delivery for special education students. Cooper and Sayeski (2005) describe inclusion as the belief that individuals with disabilities are a part of society and therefore should be included in all aspects of society. Friend and Pope (2005) define inclusion as the understanding that all students, such as gifted students, average learners, and those students who struggle should be fully welcomed members of their school communities and all professionals in a school share responsibility for their learning. The philosophical ideas of inclusion are the normalization of children through integrated general education classes and the elimination of labels for students with disabilities (Lerner, 2000). York, Doyle, and Kronberg (1992) describe inclusion as a value to live by where inclusion communities are ones where everyone is valued and where members work together to support each other to maximize individual potential.

Inclusion is also a term that has many different interpretations. One interpretation of inclusion is placing all students from all categories of disabilities and all degrees of severity into the regular education classroom, which is referred to as full inclusion (Lerner, 2000). Full inclusion involves the breaking down of the parallel systems of special education and regular education (Villa & Thousand, 1991), combining them into one system (Stainback & Stainback, 1988) and transforming schools into inclusive communities (Thousand & Villa, 1991; Villa, Thousand, Meyers & Nevin, 1996).
Opponents of full inclusion have a different interpretation of inclusion. Even though full inclusion opponents argue for increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, they also strongly support maintaining a continuum of services for students with disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Leiberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). The different inclusion philosophies have overwhelmingly been disputed and discussed by leading researchers in the field through numerous books, journals, and position papers. It is evident that a division still exists between supporters of full inclusion (Lily, 1986; McLeskey & Pugach, 1995; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Thousand & Villa, 1991; Villa et al., 1996; Will, 1986) and supporters for inclusion with a continuum of services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Leiberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985; Roberts & Mather, 1995; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). Despite the lack of agreement in the literature, inclusion continues to grow in the public schools. In the next section, the arguments from each inclusion philosophy will be discussed.

Full Inclusion

Supporters of full inclusion have many philosophical and empirical arguments to support their position. Most full inclusionists refer to the lack of empirical evidence to justify the practice of categorizing children and special programs for students with disabilities (Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987). Advocates of full inclusion argue there is very little evidence that children do better or need a segregated setting in order to be educated (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Sapon-Shevin, 1994,1995).
Evidence from past studies suggests the segregation of students with disabilities in separate classes is damaging to their academic and social development and students with disabilities perform better in regular classrooms (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1995). Shepard, Smith, and Vojir (1983) found in their research that the process of identifying students with a disability is often inconsistent and inaccurate. Distinguishing between students who do and do not have a mild disability is not done in a sophisticated manner. In addition, many studies claim often students identified as having a learning disability differ little from other low achieving students in the general education classroom in regard to school characteristics (Bartoli & Botel, 1988; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Christenson & Weiss, 1987).

Supporters of full inclusion maintain there are many social and emotional benefits for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Full inclusion advocates believe students with disabilities benefit socially and emotionally from more inclusive education placements due to the opportunities to make friends. Through staying in the general education classroom, students with disabilities have more time to make and sustain friendships with their nondisabled peers (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Advocates propose students with disabilities in inclusive programs feel less stigmatized, are better liked and accepted, and have more positive self-perceptions, than students in special education classes (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1996). Others claim self-esteem and feelings of self-worth increase with inclusion programs, because students with disabilities are less likely to be identified as “slow” by their peers (Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1994, 1995).
In addition to the social benefits, inclusion advocates emphasize the academic benefits students with disabilities experience in the general education classroom. Stainback and Stainback (1992) propose students with disabilities enjoy increased instruction time due to inclusion, because students are no longer traveling to the resource room for instruction and missing key content in the general education classroom. Through inclusion, general education teachers take more responsibility for students with disabilities instead of sending them to resource rooms. Advocates for full inclusion refer to a number of studies that support the effectiveness of inclusive programs for students with learning disabilities. Students in these studies did at least as well, if not better, on academic and social measures in inclusive settings as compared to separate class settings (Bear & Proctor, 1990; Madge, Affleck, Lowenbraun, 1990; Waldron, 1994). Studies have found that students with learning disabilities can be supported in general education settings for the entire school day with academic achievement at least as high, if not higher than those achieved in separate class settings (Banerji & Daily, 1995; Bear & Proctor, 1990).

P.L. 94-142 requires educational services for students with disabilities, but it does not require a special education system (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Proponents of full inclusion claim a merged system where individualized adaptations and supports are made available to all children in general education will be better for meeting the needs of all students (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Lilly, 1988, Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) call for the joining of effective practices from special and regular education to establish a general education system that is more inclusive and better serves all children. Gartner and
Lipsky (1987) recognize that merging the two educational systems will require a paradigm shift and a fundamental change in the way educators think about differences among people, in the ways educators choose to organize schools, and in how educators view the purpose of education. Full inclusion advocates recognize there are no quick fixes and in order to achieve successful inclusion (McLeskey & Pugach, 1995), it will take deep structural and curricular change and educators must be tolerant of that process (Fullan & Miles, 1993).

Continuum of Services Arguments

Many professionals in the literature express concerns about whether full inclusion is appropriate for all students and emphasize the importance of maintaining a continuum of services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kaufman, 1993; Kauffman & Mock, 2002; Roberts & Mather, 1995; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Zigmond, 2003). Supporters for a continuum of services for students with disabilities cite two main reasons. First, opponents of full inclusion believe there is an inadequate research base to advocate such a drastic change to the current educational system (Kaufman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Lieberman, 1985; Messinger, 1985; Vergason & Anderegg, 1989). Secondly, many students with learning disabilities need individualized teaching and explicit instruction, which some researchers believe is extremely complex and difficult to provide in the general education classroom (Zigmond, 1995, 1997). In the next few paragraphs, these two arguments will be further delineated.

Advocates of a continuum of services believe inclusion ignores the notion of individual planning and that students with disabilities need more intensive instruction
then can be provided in a general classroom (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Roberts & Mather, 1995). “The bedrock of special education is instruction focused on individual need” (Zigmond, 2003, p. 119). Many students with learning disabilities need individualized teaching and explicit instruction, which is difficult and extremely challenging to provide in a general education classroom. (Zigmond, 1995, 1997, 2003). Zigmond (1995) in her research in elementary classrooms found that often the needs of students with disabilities are neglected and their educational outcomes are disappointing when in the general education classroom.

Supporters of a continuum of services have many valid arguments for keeping a range of services available for students with disabilities. In an interview for Exceptional Children, Kauffman (1995) emphasized how children with disabilities sometimes need speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and they should not be denied those services due to full inclusion. Additionally, Kauffman stated that general education teachers need to provide “different types of instruction for different types of students” which is challenging to provide in the general education classroom (O’Neil, 1995). Full inclusion threatens the varied and intense service delivery options that advocates have spent years obtaining for students with disabilities (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). The availability of a continuum of services has been mandated in the law since 1975 and reflects the wishes of many parents, educators and legislators and the loss of these service options would violate the civil rights of students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995).

Supporters of a continuum of services also argue the “research evidence on the relative efficacy of one special education service delivery model over another is scarce,
methodologically flawed, and inconclusive” (Zigmond, 2003, p. 194). Some studies support positive trends with inclusion programs (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1995; Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Bear & Proctor, 1990), however others have reported disappointing or unsatisfactory academic and social achievement through inclusion models (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Zigmond & Baker, 1990; Zigmond et al., 1995). Roberts and Mather (1995) found that when provided appropriate support, many students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in the general education classroom, but students with more severe learning disabilities need more intensive service, which are provided in special education classrooms. Inclusive programs can be effective for some students, but not all students with disabilities (Hocutt, 1996; Manset & Semmel, 1997).

**Conclusion on Inclusion Literature**

The research on special education placement spans more than three decades and provides no compelling research evidence that place is the critical factor in the academic or social progress of students with mild/moderate disabilities (Zigmond, 2003). No placement intervention in the research literature eliminates the impact of having a disability and no model is effective for all students with disabilities. The placement or setting is not a treatment, but it is what goes on in that setting for student with disabilities that is important (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1997; Zigmond, 1997). The one thing that makes the difference for students with disabilities is the level and quality of instruction (Zigmond, 2003).

Numerous researchers have proposed it is not the placement in the general education classroom, but the instructional strategies used by the general education teacher
that makes the difference for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Vaughn & Schumm 1995; Zigm, 2003). McLeskey and Pugach (1995) believe it is time the dialogue in the special education literature moves from why inclusion cannot work to focusing on the methods to make classrooms and schools more accommodating places for all students, including those with disabilities.

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). For the first time ever, IDEIA changed how students with learning disabilities are identified for special education services by adding a response to intervention (RTI) component in the law. Before qualifying for special education services, school districts have to ensure that the students’ learning difficulties are not due to a lack of adequate instruction in reading or math. With RTI teachers are responsible for providing appropriate instruction using scientific based interventions in the general education classroom. This new provision in the law added greater accountability for general education teachers and the instructional strategies they use when teaching students with disabilities (Friend, 2005).

Instructional Strategies for Inclusion

In the last two decades, considerable progress had been made in designing, implementing and evaluating effective interventions for students with learning disabilities (Gersten, 1998). A number of studies have focused specifically on the best instructional strategies for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Researchers in the field of education have used a number of terms and phrases when describing their findings: (a) best academic practices for inclusive classrooms (King-Sears, 1997); (b) learning
disability intervention research (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000); (c) best practices for students with learning disabilities (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997); (d) research-based practices for inclusion (Schmidt, Rozendal, & Greeman, 2002); (e) six principles of effective curriculum design for inclusion (Kame’enui & Simmons, 1999); and (f) inclusive practices of classroom teachers (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). In addition, several meta-analyses and research syntheses studies regarding intervention strategies for students with learning disabilities were completed with support from the U.S Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, which have further added to the body of literature on effective instruction for students with disabilities (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 1999; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Gersten, Williams, & Fuchs, 2001; Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998).

Although not all of the findings from these meta-analyses and research synthesis studies were from inclusive settings, the outcomes from this research have significant implications for educating students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. These findings will be evaluated in the literature review. For the purpose of this study, the phrase, instructional strategies for inclusion, will be used to describe the teaching practices and types of instruction found to be effective in the literature for students with disabilities. It is important to note that most of the research selected specifically studied students with mild or moderate disabilities. Even though many of the instructional strategies have merit for the entire range of students with disabilities, students with mild or moderate disabilities make up the largest percentage of students.
with special education services and are more likely to be serviced through inclusion programs.

After reviewing this comprehensive body of literature regarding the instruction of the students with disabilities in the general education classroom, a number of instructional themes emerged. In the next section of this chapter, these instructional themes for inclusion will be described and examined in order to develop a lens in which to view this study through. These themes include: (a) teacher directed instruction; (b) instructional grouping; and (c) collaboration. The instructional strategies selected are broad instructional practices that can be used in any classroom or content area. Before discussing the instructional themes, it is important to first review the basis for effective instruction, which is grounded in the cognitive development theories of Piaget (1954) and Vygotsky (1978).

**Cognitive Development Theories**

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, developed the first theory of cognitive development. According to Piaget (1970) people’s thinking processes change radically from birth to maturity, because individuals are constantly trying to make sense of the world. Piaget described four factors that interact to influence children’s thinking: biological maturation, activity, social experiences, and equilibration. Maturation is the development of biological changes that are genetically programmed in every child from conception. Activity is the ability to interact with the environment and learn from it. Social experiences or social transmission includes interacting with people and learning
from others. Maturation, activity, and social experiences all work together to influence cognitive development.

Piaget (1970) concluded all individuals have an inherit tendency toward organization and adaptation. According to Piaget, children organize their thinking processes into psychological structures or schemes, which are the basic building blocks of thinking. As children develop their thinking becomes more organized and new schemes develop. Children also have an inherent ability to adapt to their environment through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation occurs when children use their existing schemes to make sense of events in their world and accommodation occurs when children change existing schemes in order to respond to a new situation. According to Piaget, changes in a child’s thinking takes place through the process of equilibration, which is the act of searching for balance. Piaget proposed children continually test their thinking processes in order to achieve balance. Children get uncomfortable when a particular scheme does not produce balance and disequilibrium happens. Piaget theorized children maintain a balance of their schemes of the world through continually assimilating new information and accommodating their thinking whenever disequilibrium occurs.

Piaget also hypothesized four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operations. Piaget believed all children pass through the same four stages in exactly the same order. The first period, sensorimotor stage, from ages zero to two years involves seeing, hearing, moving, touching, and understanding that objects exist in the world. By ages two to seven years, children enter the preoperational stage where they begin to develop language and
schemes, but still have difficulties seeing another person’s point of view. In the concrete operational stage at seven to eleven years, children are able to solve concrete problems, understand the laws of conservation, can classify and seriate and understand reversibility. The last stage, formal operations, which is years elevn-adult, children are able to solve abstract problems in a logical fashion, are more scientific in their thinking and develop concerns for social issues and their own identity.

Piaget’s (1970) theories of cognitive development have many implications for effective instruction. For one, students in any classroom, but especially inclusive classrooms will vary greatly in their level of cognitive development and in their academic knowledge. Teachers should prepare materials and lessons for several different levels and for a range of cognitive abilities. In order to meet the students’ needs, teachers can introduce topics to the entire class, but then have individual follow-up activities that are matched for the student’s level. Using the four stages of development, teachers can determine if students in their classrooms are having trouble because they lack the thinking abilities to understand and process at that level or if the students’ problems are due to a lack of basic skills (Woolfolk, 2001).

According to Piaget (1970), children construct their understanding and learning in a constructive process. In inclusive classrooms, students should be actively engaged in the learning process at every level of cognitive development. This active engagement should include both physical manipulation of objects and mental manipulation of ideas. Also, it is important that students are able to incorporate information from the classroom into their own schemes. Children need to interact with teachers and peers in order to test their thinking, to be challenged and to receive feedback. In addition, Piaget’s ideas of
disequilibrium apply to effective instruction. When teachers setup situations where
children experience a conflict between what they think should happen and what actually
happens, they rethink the situation and new knowledge develops (Woolfolk, 2001).

Piaget’s influence on the field of education has been enormous, but not without
some criticism. Most psychologists agree with Piaget’s descriptions of “how children
think, but many disagree with his explanations of why thinking develops” (Woolfolk,
2001, p. 40). Some psychologists question the existence of four separate stages of
thinking (Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983) and believe Piaget underestimated the cognitive
abilities of children (Gelman, Meck, & Merkin, 1986). Lastly, Piaget’s theories were
criticized for lacking the influence of culture on cognitive development. (Woolfolk,
2001).

A major advocate for sociocultural theory was Lev Vygotsky, a Russian
psychologist, who wrote about language, culture, and cognitive development. Vygotsky
(1978) provided many alternatives to Piaget’s theories. Vygotsky believed social
interactions actually created children’s cognitive structures and thinking processes.
Vygotsky more than Piaget emphasized the significant role adults and peers play in
children’s learning. First, higher mental processes develop in children as they are co-
constructed during shared activities. As children engage with adults or peers, they
exchanged ideas and new ways of thinking about concepts. These co-created ideas are
then internalized by children and become part of the child’s cognitive development.
Vygotsky also believed that cultural tools play important roles in cognitive development.
Cell phones, number lines, calendars, signs, etc. are some examples of cultural tools that
are passed from adults to children through formal and informal interactions and teachings.

Vygotsky’s (1978) theories have many implications for instruction in inclusive classrooms. Vygotsky believed children should be guided and assisted in their learning and saw teachers, parents and other adults as key to children’s learning and development (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). Teachers provide assisted learning through scaffolding. With scaffolding, teachers give students information, prompts, reminders, and encouragement at the right time and in the right amounts. Eventually, teachers allow students to do more and more on their own (Woolfolk, 2001). Sometimes there are problems beyond a child’s capability, which Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development. In the zone of proximal development, a child cannot solve a problem or task alone, but can be successful under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more advanced peer (Wertsch, 1991). Therefore, the zone of proximal development is the area where instruction and real learning takes place (Woolfolk, 2001).

Vygotsky (1970) stressed the important role teachers play in children’s cognitive development. Through direct teaching, guiding, and assisting students, teachers are central to children’s learning and cognitive development. In inclusive classrooms, when teachers have an understanding of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, teachers assist students by adapting materials, talking students through steps, modeling, and giving detailed feedback. Vygotsky also stressed the importance of peer interactions and cooperative learning. Sometimes the best teacher is another student, because often a student’s peer is functioning in the same or a little higher zone of proximal development. Through dialogue and discussion, the students can guide each other to solve a problem.
Together Piaget and Vygotsky’s theories of cognitive development have influenced how teachers teach. This next section will move from the theories of cognitive development into actual classroom instructional practices. The instructional themes from the inclusion literature review: (a) teacher directed instruction; (b) instructional grouping; and (c) collaboration will be discussed. Under each theme, the specific instructional strategies will be described, followed by recent research findings that support the use of the strategy in inclusive classrooms. In addition to the instructional strategies for inclusion, additional studies from the general education realm have reported qualities and characteristics of classrooms and teachers that produce high-achieving students. Although the focus of most of these studies was on students without disabilities, the findings are general principles of good instruction that also benefit students with disabilities. It is an underlying assumption that all teachers at any level or type of classroom use these foundational elements of good teaching. It is important to briefly discuss these instructional practices as part of the instructional constructs of this study.

**Good Teaching Practices**

Effective instruction is not a method of teaching, but rather a series of characteristics, which can be embedded into a range of teaching methods (Good, 1994). Effective instruction involves implementing strategies in planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating instruction (Ysseldyke & Salvia, 1995). Good teachers clearly define what they want their students to learn through goals, objectives, and student outcomes (Lenz, Alley, & Schumaker, 1987) and establish a positive classroom environment
(Wang, 1987). When it comes to implementing instruction, effective teachers use the following strategies: maintain a high rate of engagement (King-Sears & Cummins, 1996), provide students with tasks that ensure a high rate of success (King-Sears, 1996), review previous work at the start of the lesson (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996), question students frequently to check understanding (Rosenshine, 1995, 1997), allow for guided and independent practice (King-Sears & Cummins, 1996), provide immediate feedback, which is specific (Ysseldyke & Salvia, 1995), use cumulative reviews (Rosenshine, 1997) and lastly use student progress data to make instructional decisions (Ysseldyke, 2001).

With all the instructional strategies available, classroom teachers must determine which strategies to employ with the right students at the right time (Marzano, 2007).

Teacher Directed Instruction

Throughout the literature review the strategies, explicit and strategy instruction, continually repeated and overlapped in the inclusion research as effective instructional strategies for teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. These two instructional strategies were grouped together under the theme teacher directed instruction because both approaches share the common elements of high levels of active teacher involvement, direction, and planning.

Explicit Instruction

Explicit teaching is teacher directed instruction. In order for new information to be understood by students with learning problems, new information is taught strategically with the critical connections made clear so students do not confuse the new information
with what they already know (Kame’enui & Simmons, 1999). Skills and concepts are presented in a clear, sequential and direct fashion that promotes student mastery. With explicit teaching, the teacher provides an explanation or model of a skill or concept and then guides students through the learning process, providing many opportunities for independent practice to ensure mastery and generalization (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). In order for students with disabilities to succeed in inclusive classrooms, most students need elements of explicit instruction that includes demonstration, guided practice, independent practice, active learner involvement, and meaningful connections of content to real life (Kings-Sears, 1997).

Explicit teaching is also referred to as direct instruction (Gersten, Carnine, Woodward, 1987). Gersten, Carnine, and Woodward (1987) describe direct instruction as having six important features: (a) an explicit step-by-step model; (b) development of mastery at each step; (c) correction for student errors; (d) gradual fading from teacher-directed activities to student independence; (e) use of ample systematic practice with a range of examples; and (f) cumulative review of newly learned concepts. Rosenberg, Westling, & McLesky, (2008) contend that the direct or explicit instruction approach has the strongest research to support its effectiveness and is the most widely used classroom intervention (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui & Tarver, 2004; Coyne, Kame’enui, & Carnine, 2007). It should be noted direct instruction is best when teaching basic skills, but is not sufficient for higher-order thinking activities.
Strategy Instruction

To effectively and efficiently learn new information or solve problems, students need strategies. Some students develop strategies independently, but often students with disabilities need to be taught explicitly strategies to help them learn new information (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLesky, 2008). With strategy instruction, teachers model and teach students different tools, methods, procedures, or techniques that enable students to complete a task successfully. The goal behind strategy instruction is for students to become independent learners. With strategy instruction, teachers need to model the strategy and give students ample time to practice the strategy on tasks (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). Additional terms sometimes used to describe strategy instruction include: metacognitive strategies, conspicuous strategies, self-monitoring, and self-questioning strategies.

For over thirty years, Deshler, Schumaker, and colleagues (2001) have established the most comprehensive set of strategies for students with disabilities. Although Deshler et al. (2001) strategies were developed for adolescent students with learning problems, many of their strategies have been adapted for students at the elementary level. Strategies they have developed include: study skills, test taking, writing paragraphs, monitoring errors, following directions, team work, self-advocacy, assignment completion, text comprehension, and many more (Deshler et. al., 2001). Schumaker and Deshler (1995) believe strategy instruction helps students with disabilities think about, complete, and evaluate school tasks and assignments with more independence. An example of a reading strategy commonly taught to students is SQ3R, which stands for
survey, question, read, recite, and review. The students are taught to break their reading down into those steps in order to improve their comprehension of text.

Strategy instruction is strongly supported by research. Dole, Brown, & Trathen (1996) compared teacher-directed instruction and traditional basal instruction and how students responded to strategy instruction. At-risk readers who received strategy instruction made larger gains than their peers in comprehension than their peers who received traditional basal instruction. Furthermore, Hughes & Schumaker (1991) found students with learning disabilities who learned a test-taking strategy scored higher on tests across content areas.

Mnemonics are another strategy taught across all content areas for students who have difficulties remembering important information. Teachers help students consolidate information into meaningful chunks of information and then use a variety of tactics like creating mental images, making familiar associations, using first-letter mnemonics or keyword strategies to help students remember the information (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLesky, 2008). HOMES is an example of a mnemonic used to help children remember the five Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior).

Mnemonics have been found to be effective in improving students’ memory and in helping students learn new information (Fontana, Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). Scruggs and Mastropieri (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 34 experiments involving the use of mnemonic strategies with students with mild disabilities and found a very high level of effectiveness with an effect size of 1.62. The effectiveness of the mnemonic strategies was consistent across a variety of subject areas, ages, instructional settings, and disabilities.
It is evident general education teachers must not only explicitly teach content to students with disabilities, but they must also specifically teach the strategies needed for students with disabilities to learn and apply information in the general education classroom. Swanson (1999) in his meta-analysis of 180 intervention studies found combined direct instruction and strategy instruction as an effective strategy for remediating academic difficulties when compared to other instructional models. This combined model of direct instruction and strategy instruction included the following components: attention to sequencing, drill-repetition-practice, segmenting information into parts or units, controlling task difficulty through prompts and cues, making use of technology, the teacher systematically modeling problem-solving steps, and making use of small interactive groups.

**Collaboration**

Collaborative practices developed during the mainstreaming and regular education initiative movement as a way to support the education of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Pugach and Johnson (1995) define collaboration as when all members of a school work together and support each other to provide the highest quality of curriculum and instruction for all students. Collaboration can be implemented at the classroom level or at the district or building level. Some examples of building level collaboration include having frequent grade level meetings, intervention team meetings, and staff meetings that include both regular and special education, in addition to other support personnel like the building principal, school psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, etc. Basically with collaboration,
teachers and other school personnel are discussing and sharing ideas together on how to best meet the needs of their students. The underlying assumption is that all teachers need to grow and develop their teaching skills and through sharing and discussing instruction with others, collaboration can foster school wide improvement (Pugach & Johnson, 1995).

Pugach and Johnson (1995) discuss five essential elements for effective collaboration: (a) recognizing the need for joint effort to achieve complex goals, (b) acknowledging the increased creativity that such joint efforts often yield, (c) enjoying the social nature of joint problem solving, even though difficult, (d) valuing individual intellectual growth of participants, and (e) reflecting about professional practices and changing procedures based on deliberate analysis of merits and pitfalls. Pugach and Johnson (1995) in a three year study of teacher collaboration, found teachers who received collaboration training significantly decreased their number of referrals to special education and became more confident in teaching students with learning needs and problems.

*Co-Teaching*

An example of collaboration at the classroom level is co-teaching. Co-teaching is when general and special education teachers provide instruction together to students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom. Other terms used to describe co-teaching, include cooperative teaching or team teaching. Bauwens and Hourcade (1991) describe three different types of co-teaching: team teaching, complementary instruction, and supportive learning activities. In team teaching both teachers jointly plan
and instruct the same content to all students. With complementary teaching, the general education teacher has primary responsibility for teaching the specific content and the special education teacher teaches specific strategies or skills (e.g. note taking, summarizing or main idea). Lastly, with supportive learning activities, the general and special education teachers plan the content and instructional goals together, but the general education teacher teaches the content with the special education teacher reinforcing and enriching the content by implementing supportive learning activities.

Although co-teaching has not been researched to the depth as other instructional approaches (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005), a number of studies have reported significant positive academic outcomes for students with disabilities in co-taught classes (Bear & Proctor, 1990; Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumm 1998; Margiera & Zigmond, 2005). Cook and Friend (1996) suggest with co-teaching students receive a wider range of instructional approaches and have a lower student to teacher ratio due to having two teachers in the classroom at the same time. Margiera and Zigmond (2005) found students with disabilities received more individual instruction with co-teaching, but less interaction time with the general education teacher when the special education teacher was present in the classroom. An important component to student success with co-teaching is co-planning time for the special and general education teacher (Bear & Proctor, 1990; Klinger et al., 1998). Lastly, there is a need for training teachers in collaboration in order to effectively implement co-teaching in the general education classroom (Klinger et al., 1998).
**Instructional Grouping**

The last theme that emerged in the literature review was instructional grouping. Instructional grouping refers to how teachers organize students during instruction. Under this theme, the instructional grouping: peer tutoring, small group instruction, and cooperative learning will be discussed. When general education teachers use a variety of instructional grouping strategies with their students, the instruction the students receive is often more focused and individualized to the students’ needs than with whole group instruction. Also, students receive more opportunities for practice, increased opportunities to verbalize what they are learning, and receive feedback and encouragement from their peers (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000).

**Cooperative Learning**

There are many different forms of cooperative learning, but they all involve students working together in teams or small groups to help one another learn (Slavin, 1991). Often the teams or groups are made up of high, average, and lower achieving students, boys and girls, and students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammate’s learning as well as their own (Slavin, 1995). When using cooperative learning, the teacher steps away from leading instruction and instead becomes a guide, supporting students to be more active learners. An example of cooperative learning would be a group of four students working on a homework assignment together after a whole group lesson or students researching a topic of interest for a science project with each student having a specific job or role to complete.
as a member of the group. Cooperative learning can be used in any grade level or content area.

A substantial body of literature supports the use of cooperative learning to effectively improve the quality and quantity of academic success for students with disabilities (Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1996). When cooperative learning was used in third and fifth grade inclusive classrooms, Kamps, Leonard, Potucek, and Garrison-Harrell (1995) found students maintained or increased their quiz scores. Leading researcher in the area of cooperative learning, Slavin (1991), in his synthesis of research on cooperative learning reported that 37 out of 44 studies revealed significant positive effects favoring cooperative learning rather than traditional methods. In addition to academic benefits, cooperative learning has positive effects on students’ self-esteem, intergroup relations, attitudes toward school, and ability to work cooperatively (Slavin, 1991).

**Peer Tutoring**

Another popular collaborative instructional arrangement that supports students with disabilities in inclusive settings is peer tutoring. Mercer and Mercer (2001) define peer tutoring as an instructional arrangement where the teacher groups two students in a tutor-tutee relationship. The teacher decides the academic tasks and provides the instructional materials. The peer tutor helps the student tutee learn, practice, or review academic skills. The emphasis of peer tutoring is improving academic skills, but often peer tutoring also fosters social skills, positive relationships, and self-esteem for both students involved. Peer tutoring can be used with students that are the same age or with
cross age students. Examples of peer tutoring tasks are writing, spelling words, solving math problems, or reading sentences.

Improvements in the reading skills of students with disabilities have been found when using peer tutoring models such as Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1997) and Classwide Peer Tutoring (Maheady, Sacca & Harper, 1988). In addition to academic benefits, Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Martinez (2002) reported enhanced social acceptance for students with learning disabilities with the use of PALS. An important finding from Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, Moody and Schumm (2000) research is that when students with disabilities serve in the role of tutor for reading, regardless of whether it is in a cross-age or same-age situation, it is related with reliably higher effects than when students are the tutee. Elbaum et al., (2000) propose the positive outcomes of students as tutor is due to the student with learning disabilities listening to a proficient model of reading, and silently following along while their peer reads orally.

Small Group Instruction

The last instructional grouping of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is small group instruction. When used judiciously, organizing students into small groups by instructional needs can be highly effective, because it allows students with disabilities to benefit from intensive and targeted instruction (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLesky, 2008). Small group instruction usually consists of three to seven students with similar needs in a specific academic area. Small group instruction provides students opportunities to express what they know and receive
feedback from other students and the teacher (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). Frequently, small group instruction is used in elementary classrooms with students who are learning basic skills in reading, writing, and math. Teachers can also use small group instruction after teaching a whole group lesson to reinforce skills or provide an opportunity for extended practice. To accommodate different rates of learning, the arrangement of groups should always remain flexible (Mercer & Mercer, 2001).

When comparing small group instruction to large group instruction, Mercer and Mercer (2001) cite many advantages of small group instruction. With small group instruction, students are able to participate more and progress at their own rate. Teachers are able to provide more feedback and monitor students’ progress better to make teaching modifications with small group instruction. Lastly, small group instruction is typically not as boring and can be helpful to students who do not learn effectively from large group instruction. It is important to note the overuse of ability grouping can be detrimental academically and socially with low-performing students if they spend most of their school day separated from their high achieving peers (Good & Brophy, 2003).

The research on small group instruction cites many benefits of the practice. Small group instruction allows for more teacher-student interactions, individualized instruction, student on-task behavior, and teacher monitoring and feedback (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000). Elbaum et al. (1999) in a meta-analysis of grouping practices and reading outcomes reported effect sizes for students receiving instruction in both small groups and student pairs as considerably higher than students receiving whole-class instruction. Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) in their analysis of intervention research in the field of learning disabilities also found small interactive groups along with controlling
task difficulty and directed response questioning was consistently linked to the highest effect sizes for students with disabilities.

Conclusion on Instruction Literature

Through the literature review teacher directed instruction, collaboration, and instructional grouping practices emerged as effective instructional strategies for inclusion. Marzano (2007) reminds teachers that research will never be able to identify instructional strategies that work with every student in every class. Inclusion can never be successful with only one method (King-Sears, 1997). The best research can do is inform teachers which strategies have a good chance of working well with students. It is the individual classroom teachers who must determine which strategies to employ with the right students at the right time. “Effective teaching is a dynamic mixture of expertise in a vast array of instructional strategies combined with a profound understanding of the individual students in class and their needs at particular points in time” (Marzano, 2007, p.5).

The General Education Teacher

The key to success for students with disabilities in inclusive classroom is the general education teacher (Keogh, 1990). Despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities, numerous researchers and practitioners have found that few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al.,1993; Malouf & Schiller, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Haager,
McDowell, Rothlein, & Samuell, 1995; Vergason & Andergg, 1991). In this last section of the literature review, the perspectives of the general education teacher in regard to inclusion and effective instruction will be discussed.

Teacher Preparation

A major problem with the inclusion movement is the limited attention devoted to planning and preparing general education teachers for inclusion (Simpson & Myles, 1990). Numerous studies have found regular education teachers perceive themselves to be unprepared to teach children with disabilities (deBrettencourt, 1999; Gately & Hammer, 2005; Salvia & Munson, 1986; Schumm & Vaughn, 1991; Titone, 2005; Welch, 1996). Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, and Scheer (1999) in their study found general education teachers do not feel confident in their ability to fulfill tasks needed to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Schumm and Vaughn (1995) reviewed 18 studies conducted over a five-year period and found general educators felt a lack of preparation in planning and implementing instructional adaptations for students with disabilities. Teachers indicated they lacked the knowledge, skills, and confidence for inclusion (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995).

The lack of training for inclusion is often due to a limited number of special education courses in teacher preparation programs. Most states require general education teachers to take only one introductory course in special education in order to receive a teaching degree (Peterson & Beloin, 1998). Usually, this course provides an overview on the different disabilities, but lacks in teaching a variety of instructional strategies for teaching students with disabilities (Reiff, Evans, & Cass, 1991). Titone (2005) found
most professionals believe inclusion cannot be taught through a single course, but should be a philosophy that permeates a program and stresses the importance of collaboration, differentiating curriculum and pedagogy, and continuing professional development. Gately & Hammer (2005) found in their study of secondary education teachers a need for less theory and more practice. Teachers in the study suggested they needed more preservice experiences, more opportunities to observe excellent teachers, and work with students with disabilities.

Another problem with the “one-shot” special education course approach to preparing teachers for inclusion is it encourages the perception that the fields of special education and general education are separate disciplines (Kemple, Hartle, Correa, & Fox, 1994). Most teacher preparation systems are a dual system, where teachers become certified as either a general education teacher or a special education teacher. This dual system seems to be partly responsible for maintaining a belief among educators that only teachers certified in special education have the appropriate skills and knowledge to teach students with disabilities (Lipsky, 2003).

Barriers to Inclusion

Many researchers believe a lack of teachers prepared to provide quality inclusive services to students with disabilities is one of the primary barriers to serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Evans, Townsend, & Duchowski, 1996; King-Sears, 1995) Proponents of inclusion have advocated for drastic changes in the responsibilities of general education teachers without seeing if general education teachers support these changes (Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991; Kauffman, Gerber, &
Semmel, 1988; Semmel,). Lieberman (1985) noted that the movement of students with disabilities into the general education classroom was not an initiative led by general education teachers. Lieberman (1985) used a wedding analogy when criticizing Stainback and Stainback’s (1984) advocacy for merging regular and special education when he referred to inclusion as, “a wedding in which we, as special educators, have forgotten to invite the bride (regular educators)” (p.513).

Through the years general education teachers have expressed numerous needs and barriers that they perceive to be the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Scruggs and Mastropieri’s (1996) investigation of general education teacher’s attitudes toward inclusion and mainstreaming since 1958, found teachers have voiced concerns over the years about quality of teacher preparation programs in addressing the needs of students placed in their classroom. General education teachers have also expressed a need for expanded sources of support, reduced class size, and ongoing training in serving students with disabilities. From their research, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) developed a list of general education teachers’ needs: (a) more time to plan for students with disabilities; (b) systematic, intensive training; (c) more personnel in classroom; (d) additional curriculum materials and equipment; and (e) class sizes of fewer than 20 students.

Lack of Effective Instruction

Many professionals propose that little progress towards educating students with disabilities in less restrictive settings has been made with inclusion programs and believe there is a need for instruction of higher quality for students with disabilities in the general
education classroom (McLeskey, Henry, & Axelrod, 1999; Vaughn, Moody, & Schumm, 1998). Due to a lack of training and support for inclusion, numerous studies have found teachers minimally change their instructional methods when students with disabilities are placed in their classrooms (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). There appears to be a significant gap in the research between the documentation of effective practices for inclusion and actual classroom practice (Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris & Roberts, 1996; Gersten, Vaughn, & Deshler, 1997; Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000; Greenwood & Maheady, 2001; Lloyd, Weintraub, & Safer, 1997; Stanovich, 2000; Vaughn, Hughes, & Klinger, 2000; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

Individualized instruction typically does not occur in the general education classroom (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; McIntosh et al., 1993; Zigmond et al., 1995; Zigmond & Baker, 1994) and many teachers make few or no adaptations for students with disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Samuell, 1995). Regular education tends to be dominated by instructional practices that are designed to teach to the “average” students instead of a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds and characteristics (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

Often whole class instruction is the most prevalent instructional strategy used in inclusive classrooms. Zigmond and Baker (1990) found the practice of whole-class instruction with little differentiated instruction as the dominant teaching strategy in their study of elementary teachers in six different schools. McIntosh et al. (1993) in their study of 60 elementary, middle, and high school general education classrooms over an entire year, observed whole-class instruction as the norm. When teachers were not
providing instruction to the entire class, they were typically walking around the room
monitoring progress and behavior, or attending to their own paperwork. Elbaum,
Schumm, & Vaughn, (1997) studied elementary students who also reported whole-class
instruction as the predominant instructional grouping format.

General education teachers cite many reasons for their use of whole group
instruction. Often general education teachers perceive that it is more feasible to provide
large-group instruction than small-group instruction for students with learning disabilities
in the general education classroom (Schumm & Vaughn, 1991). Teachers have also
reported that finding time to individualize instruction and provide mini lessons to
students with disabilities is difficult (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordan, & Rothlein, 1994;
Scanlon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996). Scott, Vitale, and Masten (1998) found that even
when teachers are aware of effective practices, most are likely to continue with whole
group instruction and neglect to individualize their instruction to meet the needs of
students with disabilities. Teachers in this study cited their unwillingness to modify their
instruction to insufficient training and lack of support from other school personnel.

Schumm and Vaughn (1991) found in their studies that most general education
teachers are willing to include students with disabilities in the physical context of their
classroom, but are less willing to make instructional changes or modifications to their
materials or environment for students with disabilities. Often teachers realize the
potential benefits of these strategies, but feel inadequate to implement them. There is a
discrepancy between what teachers know they should do, what they are capable of doing,
and what they actually do in classrooms (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996).
King-Sears and Cummings (1996) propose no matter how much general education teachers know about effective instruction, the challenge is to increase teachers’ comfort level so that multiple instructional strategies become everyday occurrences in classrooms. Preparation and support is needed to remediate the discrepancy between what is known about effective teaching and what is done to assist teachers to achieve their full potential for implementing inclusion (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). King-Sears and Cummings (1996) believe increasing teachers’ comfort level with innovative inclusive practices can be accomplished through inservice training, professional conferences, university and school system partnerships, and peer coaching. Effective strategies for inclusion occur more often when teachers are given adequate preparation and support as they strive to refine their teaching repertoires.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

Through the literature review on the historical evolution of inclusion, it is evident educating students with disabilities in the public schools continues to be a controversial issue in education. Despite numerous studies over the past three decades, the literature on the effectiveness of full inclusion versus pullout special education programs is inconclusive. The practice of inclusion continues to grow despite general education teachers’ lack of preparation and training for inclusion.

In recent years, we have learned that it is not the placement in the general education classrooms that makes the difference for students with disabilities, but it is the instructional strategies used by general education teachers. In the last two decades, considerable progress has been made in designing, implementing, and evaluating
effective interventions for students with learning disabilities. Although the research on effective instruction is abundant, studies continue to reveal general education teachers minimally change their instruction when students with disabilities are present.

After more than thirty years of educating students with disabilities in the public schools, educators continue to struggle with how to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have revealed there is a gap between the research on effective instruction and actual classroom practice, but few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Little is known about how general education teachers plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. This study explored how general education teachers describe the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. Since general education teachers make daily instructional decisions for the education of children with disabilities, their experiences provide valuable information about what is needed for successful inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and methodology of this study. All research has a purpose that establishes the direction for the research (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2000). The intent of this study was to explore and analyze how general education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms when teaching students with disabilities, in addition to investigate what supports and barriers teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities. This chapter will: (a) review the research questions; (b) expand on the research design; (c) describe the data collection methods; (d) explain the data analysis procedures; and lastly (e) discuss the study’s limitations and delimitations.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, Mertens (2005) suggests research questions form from the inadequacies of current theory and research. From the review of the literature in Chapter II, it is evident there is a gap between the research on effective instruction and actual classroom practice, but few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Very little is known about what effective instructional strategies general education teachers use or how they plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. Therefore, this study investigated the following research questions:
1. How do general education teachers describe how they respond to having special education students in their classroom?

2. How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for all their students? How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for special education students?

3. What specific instructional strategies do general education teachers describe as their means of addressing the needs of students in their classrooms? How do general education teachers describe the way special education students respond to those instructional strategies?

4. What supports and barriers do general education teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities?

5. Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a high percentage of special education students? Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a low percentage of special education students?

Study Methodology

This study was focused on understanding the instructional experiences of general education teachers of inclusion. When deciding research methodology, Rudestam and Newton (2001) remind researchers that research methods need to evolve out of the research questions. Since this study asked open-ended questions looking for rich descriptions about the instructional experiences of general education teachers, a quantitative research design was not appropriate. Quantitative methods are best used when identifying factors that influence an outcome or to test a theory or explanation.
(Creswell, 2003). Instead when a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood, a qualitative design is recommended (Creswell, 2003).

This study investigated the deeper perspectives of general education teachers through face-to-face interactions (Newton & Rudestram, 2001) using a qualitative research design. This research approach is in the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2005) where researchers believe it is both possible and important to discover and understand how people make sense of what happens in their lives (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2000). In qualitative research, the researcher learns from participants to understand the meaning of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and it seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience (Newton & Rudestam, 2001). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research uses an inductive approach and the researcher does not make assumptions among the data prior to making the observations, but instead the theory emerges once the data are collected (Newton & Rudestam, 2001).

There are many different ways to perform qualitative research: case studies, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnographic research, but the method most appropriate for this study was a phenomenological study. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences of individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The intent of a phenomenological study is to understand and describe an event from the point of view of the participants. A key characteristic of this approach is to study the way in which members of a group or community interpret themselves, the world and life around them (Mertens, 2005). The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the experiences of general education teachers and how they view and
interpret their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Study Methods and Procedures

In the next section, the specific details of the research procedures will be described, so future researchers can generalize the results from this study to other situations. Extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study will be thoroughly discussed in order to develop transferability, which is the qualitative parallel to external validity in postpositivist research (Mertens, 2005). This section will: (a) discuss the interview approach; (b) explain the role of the researcher; and lastly, (c) describe the sampling method and ethical considerations.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Patton (1990) proposes researchers to conduct interviews in order to learn the things they cannot directly observe. Qualitative interviewing is not used to get answers to questions, but to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1988). Generally, qualitative studies use unstructured, open-ended interviews, because they allow for the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both the participants and interviewer; however, the use of semi-structured interviews is not uncommon and used when the researcher seeks to obtain specific more focused information (Schwandt, 2001). Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of unstructured, open-ended interviews with directionality and an agenda to produce focused, qualitative, textual data (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte,
This study collected data using semi-structured interviews in order to explore how general education teachers describe their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities.

In order to ensure that the same information was collected from all the participants, an interview guide was used. The interview guide included open-ended questions and topics to help structure the interview, but when needed, the interviewer also explored, probed, and asked additional questions to clarify and expand on a particular topic. The interview guide helped make interviewing across a number of different participants more systematic and comprehensive by defining in advance the issues to be explored (Patton, 1990). The open-ended questions were framed in a way, so the participants could represent their views and perspectives in their own words and terms, in addition to taking the questions in any direction that they chose (Patton, 1990).

Listed below are the questions and topics explored during the interviews:

1. Describe the makeup of your classroom?

2. Describe how you plan your instruction each week? When do you plan? How much time does it take? Do you write out lesson plans? What are you thinking when you plan your instruction? How do you choose your instructional strategies? How do you feel about lesson planning?

3. Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it. How did the students respond to the lessons? How did the students with disabilities respond?

4. Describe the instructional approaches that you use most often. How do students respond to your instruction? How do the special education students respond to your instruction?
5. How do you know whether or not students are successful? What do you do when they are not?

6. What supports for students with disabilities do you have in your classroom?

7. Can you think of a specific student with a disability that you had and tell me a story about your instructional experiences with the student?

Since qualitative research studies subjects in their natural setting, all interviews except one, took place in a school building at a time convenient for the participants. All interview sessions were tape recorded for purposes of transcription. When needed, the researcher used follow-up interviews after transcription to clarify meaning or explore areas in more depth.

**Role of the Researcher**

The primary instrument in qualitative research is human, so all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspectives (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, it is important that researchers reflect on their values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases that they bring to their research (Mertens, 2005). This is important, because when another researcher looks at the data collected, they may sort and interpret the findings differently (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bias must be controlled if the results of a study are to seem truthful (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2000). A researcher can achieve an unbiased attitude through the process of self-disclosure, where the researcher considers the research problem in relation to their background and attitudes before conducting the interviews (Patton, 2005). Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (2000) suggest when an attempt is made to create an awareness of the researcher’s assumptions,
it can have a positive effect on the research process. In the next section, the researcher will explain her background, biases, values, and personal interests about the research topic and process (Creswell, 2003).

*Self-Disclosure*

My experiences as a classroom teacher for seven years prevented me from being a neutral party within this study. I bring to the study my personal experiences from planning instruction in general and special education classrooms as well as my personal values, beliefs, and assumptions about educating students with disabilities.

For the first four years of my teaching career, I was a special education teacher. I taught one year in the state of Minnesota within the Albert Lea Area School District in a traditional resource setting at the elementary level. I then moved to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and taught for three years in the Gwinn Area Community School District in an elementary resource room for students with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, and autism. While teaching special education, I was sometimes frustrated with the range of instructional adaptations I observed in the general education classroom. Some general education teachers were very accommodating while other teachers made few or little instructional changes when special education students were placed in their classroom.

While teaching special education in the Gwinn School District, I completed my Master of Arts in Learning Disabilities and completed an Education Specialist Degree in Administration and Supervision from Northern Michigan University. After teaching special education, I taught sixth grade as a general education teacher in the Gwinn Area
School District for three school years. As a general education teacher, I planned instruction for students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom.

After teaching sixth grade, I moved into administration and was the building principal at K.I. Sawyer Elementary School for three years. Currently, I am the Special Programs Administrator for Gwinn Schools and am responsible for special education and Title I programming, in addition to parent involvement, curriculum, and school improvement. Furthermore, I teach special education courses at Northern Michigan University during the summer semesters. In my courses, I cover the history of special education, special education law, inclusion, and instructional approaches and accommodations for students with disabilities.

Through disclosing my professional experiences, it is evident I have a number of experiences with instruction and students with disabilities that influence my background, biases, and values. Although every effort will be made to ensure objectivity in this study, my biases as a researcher may shape the way I analyze and interpret the data. In the data analysis section, a number of methods to address this limitation will be described. Although my experience is a limitation, my personal experiences as a special and general education teacher are also a positive and valuable resource in this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that an empathetic understanding of the participants and the setting by the researcher is a characteristic of qualitative research.

Sampling

Purposive criterion sampling was employed in order to interview teachers who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information, but also meet certain
criteria. The criteria for participation in the study will be thoroughly disclosed in the following paragraphs. The researcher was specifically interested in studying elementary education teachers who taught in inclusive classrooms in the public school system in the state of Michigan. Teachers who taught in special classrooms, such as music, art, library, technology, or physical education were not included in this study. Inclusive classrooms in this study were defined as classrooms that include special education and regular education students.

For this study, elementary education teachers were defined as teachers who teach in second through fifth grade. First grade teachers were not included in this study due to the tendency of students with learning disabilities not being identified and labeled special education by first grade. Sixth grade teachers were not included in this study due to the variation of sixth grade programs from being self-contained classrooms to middle school type settings.

The sampling method used was purposeful and also what Patton (1990) calls extreme or deviant case sampling. Deviant case sampling focuses on cases that are rich in information, because they are unusual or special in some way (Patton, 1990). Michigan’s state average for special education students is 14.4 percent (Michigan Compliance Information System, 2006). The researcher selected nine of the participants from schools with high special education populations (15 percent or more) and six of the participants from schools with low special education populations (less than 15 percent). The researcher was interested in this sample in order to explore and compare the themes that developed between schools with differing special education populations.
Teachers were invited through e-mail to participate in the study. If interested, teachers were asked to complete a short demographic survey and return to the researcher through e-mail. After one and two weeks, the researcher sent e-mail reminders about the study invitation. After one month, the researcher purposely selected a sample of participants to interview. Due to expense and time, qualitative researchers often use fewer participants than quantitative researchers (Patton, 2005).

**Ethics**

All participants completed the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) consent of a responsible adult form. The form informed the participants who was conducting the study, why they were singled out for participation, time commitment, benefits to be expected, potential risks and how they have been managed, and discussed how confidentiality will be handled. All participation was voluntary and participants were given the opportunity to learn about the results of the study afterwards.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis begins with the process of organizing, reducing, and describing the collected data (Schwandt, 2001). Unlike quantitative analysis there are no prescribed formulas for qualitative analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2006) remind researchers that qualitative analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion and it is not neat. However, good practice and procedures enhance the credibility of qualitative research. In this last section, the data analysis procedures will be explained and the steps taken to ensure the results from this study are credible, transferable, dependable, and authentic.
will be thoroughly described. To guide the data analysis, the researcher used the seven phases of data analysis described by Marshall and Rossman (2006) as a means to reduce data, create manageable pieces, allow for interpretation, and find meaning in the words of the participants. The seven phases included: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; and (f) searching for alternative understandings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Organizing the Data

Data analysis first begins with organizing the data. Organization of the data involved keeping information provided by each participant separate and in sequence with the order of the interviews. The process of organizing the data allowed it to remain manageable, easily accessible, and readily available. The digital audio files from the interviews were carefully transcribed into written form. Electronic folders were established to create organization for the data collected from each individual participant.

Immersion in the Data

Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading of the interviews to gain an understanding of the content. This involved reading through the interviews at least three times. Following Hatch’s (2002) recommendations for qualitative analysis, the researcher created a sheet of notes for each participant. The summary sheets were a quick way to refer back to the original data as the data analysis continued (Hatch, 2002).
Generating Themes and Categories

After the initial readings, Hatch (2002) recommends researchers read data through completely with one typology in mind. Patton (1990) defines typologies as classification systems made up of categories that divide some aspect of the world into parts. According to Hatch (2002), typologies are generated from the theory, common sense, or research objectives. For this study, the researcher used the typologies or themes from the literature review as the constructs through which to view the data.

Coding the Data

After reading through the data with each construct or typology in mind, the researcher coded the data into five categories from the literature by taking excerpts of text from the data and identifying it within a particular category.

Writing Analytic Memos

After everything was coded, the researcher read through the data again while writing analytic memos on her thoughts and insights and began the process of offering interpretations. During this stage the researcher began to interpret the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers’ instructional experiences through pulling salient themes, reoccurring ideas, and patterns of belief that resonated collectively throughout the interviews.
Offering Interpretations

The offering of interpretations began following the emergence of themes in the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe this part of the data analysis brings meanings to the themes and categories and allows the researcher to develop links between the interviews. The researcher began to interpret the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers’ instructional experiences.

Searching for Alternate Understandings

Rossman and Marshall (2006) remind researchers there will always be alternate explanations existing within the data. Before moving forward, the researcher stopped and evaluated the findings for other plausible explanations.

Validating the Accuracy of the Findings

Qualitative research does not claim to be replicable. The researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur naturally (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study took many extra steps in order to ensure the results from the data analysis were credible, transferable, dependable, and authentic.

Credibility

Mertens (2005) defines credibility as a correspondence between the way a participant actually perceived social constructs and the way the researcher portrays the participant’s viewpoints. To ensure credibility in this study, the researcher used
persistent observation that allowed for interviews that were long enough to identify salient issues (Mertens, 2005). Fourteen of the interviews took place in the participants’ classroom, which provided a natural environment for discussing instructional practices. When the participant’s described their instructional practices, they often shared examples of their teaching materials and lesson plan books from the classroom to support their statements.

The researcher also monitored her own developing constructions and documented any changes she experienced from the beginning of the study to the end in the analytic memos. This procedure began with the researcher’s disclosure of values, beliefs, and experiences that connect her to the topic of research.

Transferability

Establishing transferability provides the degree to which the results can be generalized to other situations. The researcher kept an audit trail, which is a meticulous record of the research process so other researchers can recapture steps and the same conclusions. Extensive and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture of the study were kept in order to develop a thick description (Mertens, 2005). Not only was the data kept, but also the evidence of how the data were reduced, analyzed, and synthesized as well as the process notes that reflect the ongoing inner thoughts, hunches and reactions of the researcher (Newton & Rudestam, 2001).
Conformability

“Conformability means that the data and the interpretation are not figments of the researcher’s imagination” (Mertens, 2005, p. 257). In order to establish conformability, the researcher kept track of the qualitative data so it can be tracked to its source in the interviews.

Authenticity

To establish authenticity within the study, the researcher must present a balanced view of all perspectives, values, and beliefs. This study used peer debriefing by having a doctoral student from Western Michigan University play the role of “devil’s advocate” asking tough questions about the data collection, data analysis, and data interpretations (Newton & Rudestam, 2001).

Limitations and Delimitations

Patton (2005) reminds us that there are no perfect research designs. There are always trade offs. One limitation in this study is the findings from the data analysis could be subject to other interpretations. This study interviewed 15 participants. Even though the participant sample size is appropriate for this study, it is not large enough to generalize this study to the general population. The perspectives reflected in this study are those of the teachers interviewed by the researcher. Subjects who responded to the invitation to participate in the study may be systematically different from those who did not respond to the invitation.
It is possible the participant’s knowledge in knowing the interviewer was a principal led to a “halo effect” where the participants did not state their true feelings in regards to lesson planning, accepting students with learning disabilities, and instructional strategies. As described in validating the accuracy of the findings section of this chapter, a number of steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the participants’ responses.

Lastly, this study interviewed only teachers who teach in the state of Michigan. As a result, the physical boundaries and cultural differences that may exist in other locations prelude the results from being generalized to other regions.

Conclusion

This chapter summarized the research design and methodology of this study. Through in-depth interviews this study explored and analyzed how general education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. The researcher used purposeful criterion and deviant sampling when selecting study participants. Data analysis followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) recommended procedures and a number of steps were taken to ensure the results from this study were credible, transferable, dependable and authentic. Lastly, a number of delimitations and limitations of the study were discussed. In the next chapter, the results from the data analysis will be summarized.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of this study. This study explored the experiences of general education teachers and how they view and interpret their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Data were collected through fifteen in-depth interviews with teachers from across Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. This chapter will: (a) describe the sample selection; (b) describe the data collection methods and procedures; and (c) review the findings from the study.

Sample Selection

This study collected data using semi-structured interviews in order to explore how general education teachers describe and interpret their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with learning disabilities. The researcher interviewed fifteen elementary education teachers who taught in inclusive classrooms in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. All fifteen participants were employed as full-time general education teachers of elementary classrooms in public school districts for the extent of the 2007/2008 school year. Data were collected over a span of three months in the spring of 2008.

Teachers were invited to participate in the study through e-mail. School districts with high or low special education populations were specifically targeted for participation in the study. Fourteen of the interviews took place in the individual participant’s
classroom. One interview was held during the participant’s spring break, so the researcher interviewed the participant at a restaurant. All environments were comfortable and provided an atmosphere conducive to conducting interviews.

Purposive criterion sampling was employed in order to interview teachers who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information. Nine of the participants taught in school districts where the special education population was considered high (15 percent or more) due to being above the state average (14.4 percent) and six participants taught in school districts with low or average special education populations (less than 15 percent). The number of special education students in the inclusive classrooms ranged from one to five. The number of students in the general education classroom ranged from 16 to 26 students.

All the participants were women. Five participants had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and ten participants had completed a Master of Arts degree, in addition to their bachelor’s degree. One participant held a Master of Arts degree in Special Education. Five of the participants taught second grade, three of the participants taught third grade, four of the participants taught fourth grade, two of the participants taught fifth grade, and one participant taught a fourth and fifth grade split classroom. The number of years teaching ranged from 4 to 34 years. Only four teachers had less than ten years of teaching experience and eleven of the participants had 10 or more years teaching experience.
Table 1. Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>High or Low Disability population</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4th/5th</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA+ 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA+16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA +30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BA+23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BA+18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the Data

Data analysis followed Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) seven phases of data analysis. The seven phases included: (a) organizing the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generating categories and themes; (d) coding the data; (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (f) and searching for alternative understandings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The researcher first organized the data through transcribing the interviews into written form. Next, the researcher became familiar with the data through extensive reading of the interviews to gain an understanding of the content. This involved reading through the interviews three times and writing initial reflections through analytic memos.

After the initial readings, the researcher then read through the data again with categories or what Hatch (2002) calls typologies in mind. Patton (1990) defines
typologies as classification systems made up of categories that divide some aspect of the world into parts. According to Hatch (2002), typologies are generated from the theory, common sense, or research objectives. For this study, the researcher used the typologies from the literature review as the constructs to view the data through.

After reading through the data with each construct or typology in mind, the researcher coded the data into five categories by taking excerpts of text from the data and identifying it within a particular category. The researcher used in vivo coding, pulling the participants’ text in its natural form. The five categories used in the initial data coding and reduction process were: (a) teacher response to inclusion; (b) student response to inclusion; (c) instruction planning; (d) instructional strategies; and (e) supports and barriers to inclusion.

After everything was coded into five categories, the researcher read through the data again and engaged in three additional rounds of data coding and reduction within each category. During this intuitive and emergent data analysis process, the researcher wrote notes on her thoughts and insights. Through this process the researcher began to interpret the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers’ instructional experiences through pulling salient themes, reoccurring ideas, and patterns of belief that resonated collectively throughout the interviews.

Findings

After seven rounds of data analysis and reduction, seven themes from the participants were identified. Themes were created when ten or more strong excerpts of text were present. The variance in the strength of the themes is evidenced in Table 2.
When reviewing the findings, the themes will be placed under the research questions for the purpose of organizing the findings from the study. Tables will further summarize the data when possible.

Table 2. Themes from Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of participant responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers respond to students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Additional staff members and volunteers provide the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students with learning disabilities.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most teachers plan instruction in isolation.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students with disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

How do general education teachers describe how they respond to having special education students in their classroom?

During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share from their experiences of having special education students in their classroom.

After being asked the following questions, the teachers shared their experiences from
memory: “Describe the makeup of your classroom? Can you think of a specific student with a disability that you had and tell me a story about your instructional experiences with the student? Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it. How did the students respond to the lessons? How did the students with disabilities respond?”

The analysis of the data led to the emergence of one theme relevant to the topic of how general education teachers respond to having students with disabilities in their classroom: (a) teachers respond to students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations.

Acceptance

Through examining the descriptions of the participants’ teaching practices and experiences, it was evident all the participating teachers were open and accepting of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The participants did not describe any negative attitudes or beliefs in regards to teaching students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. Five general education teachers specifically articulated their acceptance of student differences and a desire for students with learning disabilities to feel a part of the classroom. Participant 1 described her acceptance of students with disabilities in her classroom with her statement, “I really don’t say to myself every day okay I have L.D. kids now I have to remember to do something different. I just kind of treat them like everyone else.” Participant 7 shared the same type of acceptance, “I forget about their labels after all year. You just kind of get used to who they are.” Participant 2 stated, “They’re very smart, they just can’t get to it the way everyone else can.”
Three participants stated they did not want their students with learning disabilities to struggle or feel different from the other students in the classroom. Participant 7 shared, “…So they don’t feel left out because that’s my biggest fear is those kids who struggle in school, I don’t want them to hate it.” Participant 10 expressed concern for a particular student with a learning disability in her classroom to like school and feel accepted:

I don’t want to isolate her. I want her to be and I think she does. She feels like she is part of the crew here. She loves school and likes to come and but that is a problem sometimes because I don’t want the kids to feel like they’re not just as, you know, like special education is like you know, like it always was when I was in school and it still kind of is.

Participant 4 shared an experience about a student that she helped participate in class:

And his mom had come back and said that he just loved it, it was a stellar year kind of. To be able to participate in the classroom. So I thought that was nice. Being able to, you know, those are the kind of things that you, that you become a teacher for. So that, I mean he will always, you know I’ll always remember him for that because you know, you can’t bring everybody, but hopefully you can touch a few.

Through examining the descriptions of the participants’ teaching practices and experiences, it was evident all the participating teachers were open and accepting of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. Five general education teachers
specifically articulated their acceptance of student differences and a desire for students with learning disabilities to feel a part of the classroom.

*Classroom Accommodations*

Another way teachers responded to their student’s learning needs was through classroom accommodations. Accommodations are alterations in assignments, activities, or tests that allow students with learning disabilities to complete the same learning tasks as their peers, but without changing the content. The discussion on accommodations will be broken into two categories: (a) student response accommodations; and (b) presentation accommodations. The number of accommodations described by the participants ranged from 1 to 5. Table 3 and 4 further summarize the accommodation data.

**Table 3. Classroom Accommodations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodations described by participants</th>
<th>Total number of participant responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Response Accommodations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shorten assignments</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scribe</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extra time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Accommodations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Test Read</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Copy of notes or study guide</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Books on tape</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Larger print</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student Response Accommodations*

Student response accommodations were the most described type of accommodation by the participants. Types of student response accommodations included: shortened assignments, alternative assignments, different expectations, extra
time, and the use of a scribe. As the participants described the accommodations it was evident the teachers had an understanding of their students’ learning needs and responded to those needs through classroom accommodations.

*Shortened Assignments*

The most common student response accommodation discussed by all the participants was shortened assignments. Participant 15 described how one particular student with a learning disability responds to shortened assignments, “We adjust his assignments. Minimize them. Reduce them, simply. But then when we do that, that’s when he does really well and he does much better than we think he would be capable of.” Participant 8 shared, “I just think, like even last night, everybody else in my classroom had 25 problems. My kids that I knew are struggling just had to do two rows.” Participant 5 stated, “I do reduce assignments. Certainly for any kind of frustration.” Participant 3 described, “I reduce assignments often or give them an alternate assignment.”

Participant 11 shared the benefits of accommodating for the high and low students in her classroom:

I do reduce assignments for those that need it and I offer challenge to those that need it and I try to be really in tune with every kid and what’s going on with them and they know it and pretty much the parents know it. So, I’ve always had real good response and support because of that.

Participant 2 also reduced assignments for her students with learning disabilities, “I might just cut down, you know some of the assignments. Like I’ll say you only, just
do the first two for me or just write a couple of sentences instead of the paragraph. Dictate to me what you want to say.” Participant 3 described giving students more time, “I give them a lot longer to complete the work too.”

*Different Expectations*

Four participants described accommodations through having different expectations for their students with learning disabilities. Participant 9 shared, “What I expect from my special education kids is different than what I expect from my other students.” Participant 3 stated, “I go over with both of them what I expect out of them. What they need to do when they come up in front of the class and it definitely isn’t what I’m expecting what the other kids are doing.” Participant 1 described, “You know they can only take in so much in the class and maintain maybe 60 percent of it which is maybe for them that’s good. My little boy just this morning he had a 59 on a social studies test so for him I guess that was pretty good.” Participant 14 described providing accommodations to students without even knowing it or preplanning through using common sense:

I have a bad habit of accommodating and I don’t know that I’m accommodating. The LD teachers tell me that all the time. What are you doing to accommodate? Well I don’t think I’m doing anything. Well then she would say how were you doing this and I told her and she says that’s accommodating. Like oh, sorry. It’s just common sense to me. It’s helping me. Yeah. You know lets cut it in half or lets you don’t have to read it in cursive like everybody else. You just do that
automatically because you know it’s going to make their life a little easier but…I know.

Participant 2 shared a number of accommodations she provides in her classroom that included extra time, re-teaching, and checking for understanding:

They need…a lot of time. I’ll have them tell me the directions back. Tell me out loud. You know. I’ll have them, you know, turn to a partner and tell them what they’re supposed to do. Um, a lot of repeating. You know. After I give the directions, I have to go around and really make sure that they know what they’re suppose to do because they don’t always get it the first time. I do a lot of re-teaching with them. Tell me instead of writing it you know. All that kind of stuff.

*Presentation Accommodations*

Accommodations to the presentation of assignments or classroom activities were another type of accommodation described by fifteen participants. The presentation accommodations included: reading tests aloud, providing a copy of notes, using books on tape, and presenting materials with larger print.

Books on tape or having the text read aloud were accommodations shared by two participants. Participant 6 stated, “Because he really struggled with reading. He was really…he was like a sponge…he remembered everything he would hear. But reading was so difficult for him so we got him books on tape.” Participant 5 described, “Books on tape sometimes. They read to me. I’ll read to them.”
Participant 1 shared how she changes the presentation to a study guide to help students with learning disabilities:

I do something that I’ve been doing for years that has really worked well is that at the beginning of the unit I give the kids a booklet, a folder that is stapled, that I make up. I outline the chapter in the book and leave blanks you know in strategic places or I’ll have spaces, do some drawing, but they are basically taking notes, but I’m telling them what to put down and writing it on the board. But if I have a student who can’t possibly keep up with writing notes, then even if they could, they can’t read it afterwards I will give them a booklet that is all filled in.

Participant 6 shared two examples of presentation accommodations she provides for her students with learning disabilities that struggle with reading. In the first statement, Participant 6 describes how she uses study guides.

One thing that I always do for them is they always get the study guide for science and social studies always because obviously you know if they are deficient in reading they can’t…in fourth grade you are reading for information now…you are not learning to read…they always get a study guide and how I usually handle that is I’ve made it…they are all stored on my computer.

It is evident through Participant 6’s next statement, the level of understanding she has for her students’ learning needs and her desire for the students with disabilities to be successful in her classroom.

I usually always made his copies were always larger print. If he was going to read because he was not the best reader he always got to like pick his paragraph and practice it and then he would read that paragraph and none of the other kids
ever knew that. I always thought well that like that’s pretty cool because like of all of a sudden people that are around there are… Like James would you like a turn now?

Another type of presentation accommodation described by the participants when discussing how they respond to students with learning disabilities in their classroom was test accommodations. Participant 5 shared her reasons for reading assessments aloud to students with learning disabilities with her statement, “Whenever they have like a test, I read the test to them, because it’s not a test of their reading.” Participant 12 also reads tests aloud, “I give him with the exception of some difficult story problems and things like that he pretty much does you know what the rest of the kids are doing but with assistance and it’s one-on-one with the test being read to him.”

Four participants provided additional test accommodations, in addition to reading the test aloud to help students with learning disabilities be successful on classroom assessments. Participant 12 described how she simplifies assessments for students with learning disabilities:

When we’re doing from the reading series I usually give like a 10 question quiz that comes as part of the reading series so they get use to multiple choice, so I go through and I cross off two choices so it’s reduced to two and this is something that I just do on my own.

In addition to reading the assessment aloud, Participant 11 divides her assessments into sections to help her students with learning disabilities:

Even today I gave a science test back. Now Kevin and Joe I had read, I had adapted the original test and I chunked it up for them to make it better for them.
Yeah. You know. And I put it in sections and this was one of the resource teachers helped me and just said that this works better for them. And I sit and orally read these tests to them while the other kids take them independently.

Participant 3 discussed a number of test accommodations she provides for her students with learning disabilities:

For testing time I’ll break it down and pick out important things I’d like them to work on and study. I always read the test with them. Make sure they understand it. For one of the boys, I will actually do the writing for him as well, like essay, short answer.

Participant 6 shared her perception of always being assigned the students with learning disabilities in her classroom, because she provides test accommodations.

Some of the things we’ve done in the past is I’ll tell you on tests…we always…if it happens to be a multiple choice…we always eliminate a couple of the choices. I shouldn’t say we. I always do and I think that’s another reason I get the LD kids is because some teachers truly believe that should not happen. And I’m like they’re LD. So I’ll eliminate. Sometimes the test, depending on how severe the disability is reduced. Sometimes I have let some of my LD kids use their books. The test is always, always, always read to them. Always.

Only participant 12 described feeling the special education teacher is better able to modify the tests for her students with learning disabilities.

Science and social studies I try to give the tests to the special education teacher before hand so she can modify them. I just feel she knows more about what is
appropriate for them and you know we try to discuss our expectations of what’s you know, what’s really important for them to know about these concepts.

Conclusions

Through analysis of the data, it was evident that the general education classroom teachers participating in this study respond to having students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations. Five of the participating general education teachers described their acceptance of student differences and a desire for students with learning disabilities to feel a part of the classroom. All the participants described accommodations they provide to students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The number of accommodations described by the participants ranged from 1 to 5. When discussing accommodations, none of the participants referred to the accommodations stated in their student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Accommodations in how students respond to assignments or class activities were the most common type of accommodation described by the participants, followed by presentation accommodations. All the participants described shortening assignments for students with learning disabilities.

Research Question 2

How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for all their students? How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for special education students?
During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share their instruction planning process. Using the interview guide, all the participants were asked, “Describe how you plan your instruction each week? When do you plan? How much time does it take? Do you write out lesson plans? What are you thinking when you plan your instruction? How do you choose your instructional strategies? How do you feel about lesson planning? Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it.” Two major themes emerged from the data in the area of instruction planning: (a) most teachers plan instruction in isolation; and (b) a variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods. Table 5 will further summarize the data.

*Instruction Planning*

It was evident the teachers in this study plan their instruction in isolation. Only six participants described planning instruction with their colleagues. The majority of the participants described planning instruction after school hours, during the evenings, or on the weekends, in addition to during the school day. Most of the participants described planning instruction in isolation as evidenced in the following statements:

Participant 12: “I usually plan whenever I find time to which could be during the specials that I have or at recess or after school.”

Participant 6: “So I use a lot of my lunchtime, prep time to do that.”

Participant 11: “Nights and weekends.”

Participant 9: “Sunday evenings and Monday mornings.”

Participant 5: “I pretty much know the curriculum anyway. So as far as
like planning, I’d say certainly two hours a week for planning but then I plan every night. I mean I do probably two hours worth of work every night.”

Participant 1: “I do all my planning at home even though I have an hour planning time 4 days a week.”

Participant 8: “My lessons I usually plan that either my Thursday prep or my Friday prep and if I don’t get out there I come out on weekends. I try to fill in for that whole week. It probably only takes me max 45 minutes.”

Participant 13: I usually do most of my planning during my prep time or sometimes I will do it after school. Stay for a while after school and get it done. It doesn’t take me quite as long as it used to just because I’ve kind of gotten into my routine with what I do.

Two participants who experienced teaching the same grade level for a number of years shared how they are able to devote less time to lesson planning. Participant 7 described her lesson planning:

I usually do it on Sundays. I bring it home on Sundays and it takes me…I don’t write out exact lesson plans but I do go through each subject. I have you know my lesson plan book and it’s blocked off each day for what it is and I go through on Sunday night…I spend about an hour and I go through the math book and see what’s coming for the week. And this is, probably my fourth year in second grade so I kind of don’t put as much planning in to it as I use to.

Participant 4 also described how planning instruction takes less time due to her experience:
I plan, well because I’ve been doing it so long, it takes less time than seems like you know. This is my tenth year in fourth grade so I am pretty familiar with the curriculum and I make changes when necessary so it takes about an hour to plan for the next week. I usually plan the Thursday before.

Participant 3 expressed how reading and math are the two subject areas that require more planning time:

So I try to do it on Friday sometimes over the weekend and how I decided what I’m going to do obviously by beyond looking at benchmarks and what not I see if there are areas of review, things that we need to go over again and plan accordingly. Reading and math definitely are my two areas where it takes a lot longer to plan. Reading, this year I went away from the basal that we’ve been using in the building and started doing more whole language, working on comprehension and fluency.

Participant 3 shared how taking the time to develop units for her lower end students takes more time:

And I work with my lower end group trying to catch them up. So I spend a lot of time getting that ready and um developing units which take a ton of time doing a lot of research online and looking for things that are already made that I can use.

Participant 11 discussed the challenges to balancing teaching, planning, and grading:

You know, I’ve always said over the years that every hour I teach at school takes another hour outside whether its paperwork or gathering materials or planning or
and so you know something’s got to give. I either plan well, I grade well or I teach well. You know it’s not all three happening everyday.

Two participants discussed the need for written lesson plans and how they enjoy having a plan for their teaching each week. Participant 2 shared, “Yeah. I think it’s a good thing to have a plan, you know. I mean after you teach for so many years you know in your head but I still need that plan. I still need to see it.” Participant 7 described how she has to have her instructional plans written and planned out for the week:

You know, I couldn’t imagine coming in and not lesson planning. I know people will say I don’t do lesson plans anymore…I don’t. I have to with my personality and the way I teach. I have to plan on Sunday night. If….I have to plan it all out. And if I’m busy on the weekend, I know I’m going to be busy, I’ll stay after school Fridays and do it because I have to have my plan written for the week. I couldn’t imagine coming here even though I’ve been in second grade for like four years now and I’ve seen the curriculum, I have to have it all planned out. Like what I need to get ready, what I have to do…I have to lesson plan. I couldn’t do it.

Two participants described how they adapt or change their lessons in response to the student’s learning needs. Participant 7 described:

Every, you know, every unit is very different. Some kids catch on to some things so quickly and some don’t. And I know that like when I notice I do plan I, you know like I said I write them out for the whole week, they never stay. What I’ve written out on Sunday night is always changing because like I’ll like teach a lesson, we’ll say I'll teach a lesson on we’re doing measurement right now and a
group didn’t get it…I’ll re-teach it the next day and the kids who did get it I give them some kind of activity to do like I’ll say okay tomorrow I’m going to put these guys to this kind of measurement activity on their own and I’m going to get the class again and we’re going to, the ones who didn’t get it, I re-teach it to. So even though I do plan on Sunday night, it’s always changing. If they don’t get a lesson I don’t move on.

Participant 6 described the need for teachers “to be ready to roll” and change lesson plans based on the behaviors of the students:

You know I have found even on days where for some reason say we just have to scrap everything. Oh my goodness. Everybody is up in arms and I think the students can feel and I don’t know that they could put a word to it that I’m not ready to go for the day but it’s just a difference in how they react to everything. And I noticed that my first year. It’s like man you need to be ready to roll because if you’re not you’ll lose them. And the behaviors come out….not a good thing.

Overall the discussion on planning instruction was positive from all the participants. Only participant 11 expressed frustration over the amount of time it takes to plan instruction:

I’m frustrated lots of times in lesson planning because you know, I just want to do it well and lots of times I’m just throwing something in there, because I need to get it done and there are a million other things I have to get at.
Only six participants described planning instruction with colleagues. Participant 9 described how her grade level colleagues share instructional ideas to help improve instruction:

There are three of us that teach second grade and it’s just amazing. It’s just amazing. One does one thing. “Oh, it didn’t work this way, let’s do it this way.” We share the units that we come up with. When we do something different we throw it in each others mailbox and we get along really well and work really well together.

Participant 14 described instruction planning and having a close working relationship with her grade level teaching partner, “We talk every day about what we’re doing, so that all that talk is really nice because we’ve come up with some great units and lessons on that type of thing.” Participant 14 and her grade level partner plan everything together and they even do some team teaching together in the classroom with their second grade students. Participant 14 described this level of collaboration as, “wonderful and once she (her teaching partner) retires I’m going to go crazy.” Through collaboration participant 14 and her colleague are also able to share some of the workload that goes into planning instruction:

Usually what I do to help us alleviate some of the you know the work, she takes care of the math and she’ll look ahead at the math and see what we need to do and how it’s working for us, and plans that and hands it to me at the, you know, the week before and says this is what we’re doing next week so I can look ahead and everything. I do all of the spelling and phonics types of things and have that prepared for her. Then we go to each other if we’re having problems in our room
or our students are having problems, we might say, I need a day, can you just do an additional subtraction page of that because my kids are having a hard time on something. So we work really closely that way and that’s wonderful.

Participant 1 described working with her grade level partner for the past fifteen years. Through the years they have developed a program where they split up their students by reading ability to provide reading interventions to students in need of remedial reading instruction. Participant 3 described switching subjects with her grade level colleague, “Mrs. T and I worked it out where she does all the science. I do all the social studies so that works out well because we do a lot of projects and then I just repeat the lesson later on in the day.” Participant 11 collaborates with her grade level partners through having a departmentalized program in her school where, “all three fourth grades come in to me for math.” The students then go to a different teacher for reading and writing.

Even though grade level meetings are a common practice in many schools, participant 2 was the only teacher who mentioned grade level meetings as a means for collaborating on instruction:

We have these grade level meetings now. We get together with the literacy coach. Do you have literacy coaches? Those are great. And our literacy coach pretty much plans that agenda. We plan with her. They give us time for us to talk a little bit, you know, within each other, like the last hour or something or half hour or whatever. But in between that we take a look at scores of kids and you know, their fluency scores and stuff like that. And we change, switch the kids around and we decide who is going to go with what interventionist you know.
Six participants described collaborating with colleagues to plan instruction for students, but not one participant discussed planning instruction with a special education teacher. One participant did describe an interest in more collaboration with the special education teacher. Participant 12 shared she would like to team teach more with the special education teacher, but the special education teacher is, “spread very thin at the moment with 18 on her caseload,” so the teachers did not feel team teaching was possible this school year.

Selection of Instructional Methods

Using the interview guide, all the participants were asked, “What are you thinking when you plan your instruction? How do you choose your instructional strategies?” Analysis of the data revealed that a variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods. These factors are organized into seven categories: (a) curriculum; (b) maintaining student attention; (c) student abilities; (d) whole group planning; (e) learning styles; (f) time; and (g) end in sight planning. The number of common factors individual participants described ranged from 0 to 5. The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was the curriculum. Table 5 will be a means to further present the data.

Curriculum

The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was the curriculum. Nine participants described thinking of the curriculum when planning instruction. Many of the participants made references to Michigan’s
Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) when discussing their thinking when planning instruction.

Participant 10: “And number one, with the lesson plans in all schools in Michigan, is the MEAP test. You know which is too bad but that’s the way it is, so the curriculum is number one.”

Participant 5: “I do change things every year though. I’m not doing the same thing over and over again, but I pretty much know the curriculum anyway.”

Table 4. Participant Responses to Students with Learning Disabilities in the Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of differences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response A.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-shorten assignments</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-different expectations</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-scribe</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-extra time</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation A.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-test read</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-copy of notes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-books on tape</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-larger print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* T refers to the total number of participant responses. A. refers to accommodations.
Participant 4: “You know and I try to keep with what you know curriculum, the state curriculum standards. I kind of use that as what kind of guides me in what I teach.

Participant 11: “I’m always thinking where we need to be going and looking at my GLCE’s and making sure that we’re moving in the right direction.”

Table 5. Factors Described by Participants when Planning Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Student Attention</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student abilities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End in Sight</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. T refers to the total number of participant responses

Participant 9: “I plan basically around my basal reader with the themes and everything with it. And it’s a story a week.”

Participant 13: “We have our GLCE’s, you know and we have to use those as our basis, our guideline.”
Participant 14: “I took the basal and I took the GLCE’s and I look through what we need for spelling and phonics.”

Participant 15:

I’ve been third in grade at least thirteen years so I pretty much know what I have to cover and I have a time line. I have a written time line plus I have a mental time line of what I need to get covered. And I know this marking period I need to cover these topics.

Participant 12:

We went through and aligned our curriculum to the GLCE’s this year, so for like math, we laid out all the GLCE’s and what lessons and kind of the time you know, so for math I basically look, oh we finished fractions--I need to start geometry now. So I really use those as a guide for me.

Maintaining Student Attention

Another common factor described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was planning activities to maintain their students’ attention. Six participants described thinking of how to keep their students’ attention and interest when planning instruction. Participant 12 shared how she has to find other ways to get her students knowledge, because, “They don’t do well with me just lecturing in third grade and with all the attention problems.” Participant 11 chooses her instructional strategies by thinking what is the best way to get her students motivated and interested and once she has their interest, she states, “we can pretty much do anything.” Participant 6 reflects back on the week when planning instruction, “I kind of reflect back on the week, what
worked well, what didn’t work well, what kind of things do I need to incorporate to make it more interesting for my students.” Participant 2 tries to get her students interested right away through using music and participant 1 shared trying to make her lessons “interesting and fun.” Participant 4 also described using music with a song to remember the names of the planets and described using “catchy ways” to capture the students’ attention.

**Ability**

Six participants described thinking about the ability of their students and their students’ learning needs when planning instruction. When choosing instructional strategies, Participant 9 described thinking of what her students are “capable of doing” and planning different activities for her high, low and middle groups. Participant 1 stated all her lesson plans “depends on the students” in her classroom. Participant 3 described spending a great deal of time to catch up her lower end students through, “developing units which takes a ton of time and doing a lot of research online and looking for things that are already made” that she can use in her classroom. Participant 8 described how her students with learning disabilities are not able to read independently out of a book, so when selecting instructional strategies she is thinking of the reading abilities in her classroom, because as she stated, “…if we read out of the book, I lose them. We lose them because they know they can’t read it.” Participant 12 determines if what she is teaching is “brand new or something the students have seen before” when planning instruction.” If a topic is “fairly new” to the students, participant 12 devotes more time to teaching the topic.
Participant 7 described how every unit she teaches is different depending on how the students respond:

Some kids catch on to some things so quickly and some don’t. And I know that like when I do plan for the whole week, they never stay. What I’ve written out on Sunday night is always changing because like I’ll like teach a lesson, we’re doing measurement right now and a group didn’t get it…I’ll re-teach it the next day and the kids who did get it I give them some kind of activity to do.

Whole Group

Four participants described having the whole group in mind when they are planning instruction. Participant 8 described her instruction planning as old school, “I try to teach to the whole…but I teach the whole class the strategy and then I try to do a review a little after every lesson.” Participant 3 shared a similar practice, “You know, I think up in our end in fifth grade we do a lot of teaching to the whole.” Using the Madeline Hunter lesson plan model and “I plan for all kids” was described by participant 2 when sharing how she selects her instructional strategies. Participant 12 stated, “I try to do like a whole class instruction and introduce a topic.”

Learning Styles

Four participants described thinking of their student’s learning styles when planning instruction. Participant 15 described starting out the school year, “pretty straight and narrow” until she gets to know the students better and then she makes adjustments, “You know if they’re a real active group and they do better discussing, we
Participant 10 shared how the instructional strategy she chooses depends on the “makeup of the kids”. In participant’s 10’s weekly lesson plans, she tries to “hit all the different learners” using hands-on, visual, auditory, whole group, and small group activities. Participant 6 also looks at “the makeup of the class” and “what they respond to the best” when planning instruction:

I try to really incorporate the learning styles in my lesson plans. I try to think of the intelligence as how do kids learn best and what is best practice you know. Should we incorporate music in to a lesson even though I can’t sing so I really try to look at all the different ideas out there and say that this child might learn better auditory but the other one needs to get up and move a little bit. So I try to plan my lessons around all those different things, which gets confusing sometimes. And you always do it. It just becomes part of who you are as a teacher.

When asked how she chooses her instructional strategies, Participant 13 shared, “I try to have a variety, so that the kids with different learning styles have an opportunity to learn however they learn best.” Participant 13 went on to describe:

Well I kind of just go by the kinds of students that I have. You know if I have a class that has a hard time staying on task, and if they function better doing small group work you know, I tend to do more of that and pull lessons that are more hands-on. If they work well that way, but sometimes you have classes that when you give them hands on they’re just all over the place. So they need more of the sit down kind of work. So I kind of try to base it on what type of class. You know what the dynamics are in the classroom and how well they work in groups.
**Time**

Two participants described time as a factor when planning instruction. Participant 12 stated, “I guess basically is how much time do I have for this lesson? What can I fit in?” Time was described as a limiting factor when planning instruction by participant 4, I’m thinking about how much time do I have? Which is a big you know constraint unfortunately. How much time can I afford to spend on this to be able to get everything in based upon what we need to teach by the end of the year.

**End in Sight**

The last factor described by a participant when planning instruction was “planning with the end in site.” Participant 6 chooses her instructional strategies by thinking, “Okay, now I know what I want it to look like, how am I going to get the students there? This is what they need to know, now how am I going to plan instruction so that they get there?” Participant 6 described thinking this method of instruction planning “seems kind of weird” but described it as a method that works for her teaching style.

**Conclusion**

Analysis of the instruction planning data revealed that a variety of factors influenced the participants’ thinking and selection of instructional methods. These factors were organized into seven categories: (a) curriculum; (b) attention; (c) student abilities; (d) whole group planning; (e) learning styles; (f) time; and (g) end in sight
planning. The number of common factors identified by individual participants ranged from 0 to 5. The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was curriculum. Although a number of participants described thinking of their students’ learning styles and abilities when planning instruction, the participants did not specifically describe thinking of their special education students when planning instruction. Most of the participants’ descriptions revealed teachers thinking of the whole group or the learning styles of most of the class versus individual students when planning instruction. Through the data analysis it was also evident most teachers plan instruction in isolation. Only six participants described planning instruction with their colleagues and none of the participants described planning instruction with the special education teacher.

Research Question 3

What specific instructional strategies do general education teachers describe as their means of addressing the needs of students in their classrooms? How do general education teachers describe the way special education students respond to those instructional strategies?

During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share from their teaching experiences how they address the needs of students in their classrooms. After being asked the following questions, the teachers shared their experiences from memory, “Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it. How did the students respond to the lessons? How did the students with disabilities respond? Describe the instructional approaches that you use most often. How do
students respond to your instruction? How do the special education students respond to your instruction? How do you know whether or not students are successful? What do you do when they are not?” Two themes emerged from the data in this area: (a) teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom; and (b) teachers believe that their students with learning disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom.

Instructional Practices

Through analysis of the data, it was evident general education teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom. The instructional practices described by the general education teachers will be organized into five categories: (a) learning style instruction; (b) small group instruction; (c) collaboration; (d) strategy instruction; and (e) whole group instruction. Table 6 will further summarize the instructional data. Due to the volume of data supporting this theme, the researcher pulled only the most salient excerpts of text that were rich in description and meaning to report the findings of this theme.

Learning Style Instruction

The instructional practice most described by the participants involved strategies for meeting the different learning styles in their classrooms. The participants described using hands-on activities, instruction for visual learners, and project-based learning. Thirteen participants described using hands-on activities in the classroom. Participant 7 stated, “I don’t like to stand up and just teach. I don’t want to be up there all the time just
telling these kids what to do” instead “I use a lot of hands on teaching.” Participant 7 described using hands-on activities in every subject. In math, participant 7 uses manipulatives for “addition and subtraction of double digits” and in social studies her students made “little factories” as part of a lesson on learning about economics. Participant 15 also described using hands-on teaching methods in math through using “bingo chips to help teach multiplication and division with remainders.”

Table 6. Instructional Practices Described by Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practices</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING STYLES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hands-on</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-visual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL GROUP COLLABORATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-peer tutoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-cooperative learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOLE GROUP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. T refers to the total number of responses from the participants.

Participant 6 shared using hands-on activities to challenge her student’s independent thinking through creating something using “boxes of yarn and buttons and junk.” Participant 6 described how she guides her student’s learning, “I tell the students,
I want you to think about an improper fraction and I want you to use anything on the table and in your own mind what does it look like with buttons and yarn?” Participant 6 shared loving the “kinesthetic part of getting students up and moving and challenging them to really think for themselves.”

Participant 7 described teaching measurement with a ruler as one of the hardest things to teach:

You have to look at each student….how they are measuring. You can’t just go to the chalkboard. This is how we do it. Try it. You have to actually roam around and watch everybody and you know you have these rulers out and you give them objects and you try to measure them and you can ask how many inches is it.

Participant 12 uses hands-on teaching in science and social studies, because reading out of the book is not effective with all the “attention issues” in her classroom. Participant 12 believes students need “to be active.” Participant 12 described always planning hands-on activities for her students like “filling in a chart, or looking for words or doing something,” because in her opinion, “whole group instruction is tough with these kids.” Participant 3 also stated using hands-on methods in Science and Social Studies through “projects and getting students involved and letting them do the research.” Participant 5 believed her experience as a kindergarten teacher shaped her to be a “hands-on” type of teacher. Participant 5 referred to hands-on teaching lessons from the past as the best years of her teaching:

We went to the River and Lake Superior and did a lot of water study and combine, integrate, that was when it was a little more creative you know. But we were able to integrate it with reading and science was kind of the driving force
and that was so much fun. Gosh that was a great year. And then we actually contributed to data collecting that the high school was doing. We were you know, taking in a reading, water samples and pH and that kind of thing. And that was just great for those kids. I think they were fourth and fifth grade. And that was probably one my best experiences as a teacher.

Participant 5 described herself as a “real believer in choices” and not telling students what to do all the time. During writer’s workshop or literature circles, the students in her classroom have a lot of options and involvement in their learning through “product fairs and activities.” Participant 5 described her students as “a very active group without the greatest of listening skills so they really need to be out of their seats and active.”

Participant 14 did not describe a specific hands-on activity, but it was evident she uses hands-on teaching methods in her classroom through her statement:

We’ve got to keep it moving, we’ve got to keep it going, we’ve got to you know all the time and so we are moving it and grooving it, and doing other things that are a little more fun than just sitting on our rear ends and doing workbook pages you know.

Eight participants described using strategies to help visual learners. Participant 4 described writing or drawing “pictures up on the board to help students visualize the lesson a bit more.” Through “diagramming stuff on the board and using different colors,” participant 4 uses visual teaching practices as a means to help keep her students’ attention and focus on the lesson. Participant 11 also shared how through using charts and color-coded materials for a student with a learning disability was helpful. Participant 8
described observing more “knowledge and retention” from her special education students through a visual science lesson involving an interactive website than in any other science lesson, because the students were “tuned in.”

**Small Group Instruction**

The second most common instructional practice described by the participants was small group instruction. All the participants described the use of small group instruction to meet the learning needs of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The participants described using small groups as the means to providing more individualized instruction to students with learning disabilities in their classroom. Most of the small group instruction described was in the area of reading instruction.

Participant 1 specifically articulated why she uses small group instruction in her classroom:

I like working with them in small groups because it like really opens my eyes to why is this child not doing well because I now realize that by talking to them they are totally not understanding how to do something. I can really zero in on what their problem is.

Participant 7 also described being able to notice right away if a student is “having a hard time” through small group instruction. Through taking advantage of her silent reading time in the classroom, Participant 7 is able to provide small group instruction daily to her students who are having difficulties:

These kids need so much extra help and I only have so much time that I stopped and I started pulling groups at that time (silent reading). I don’t do the same kids
everyday, I pick different kids. I say oh, this person doesn’t get this. I’m going to pull these two kids over and we’re going to work for about 20 minutes where everybody reads on a math thing or I’m going to place two kids and do some extra reading with them. Because that’s the only time I really have in the day that it is quiet enough that I can pull kids.

Participant 3 described using small group instruction before whole group instruction when teaching vocabulary. Through this practice, Participant 3’s special education students are able to answer questions in class that “other students might not be able to,” because the students received the instruction in a small group before the class lesson. Participant 3 shared her special education students “like to feel successful and they can feel successful by working beforehand.”

Additional evidence of small group instruction as described by the participants:

Participant 14: “We would teach our lesson whole to the class…then we split the rest of them up in to three groups—a very high level group, then the medium level and the Title I students would go to the Title I teacher.”

Participant 3: “I have my students divided up really almost in ability groups now.”

Participant 12: “Sometimes if we’re doing something really hard she (paraprofessional) might take a group and I will take a group and we’ll work in small groups.”

Participant 9: “A lot of small groups. Lots where I take them back here and work with a couple at a time.”
Participant 14: “What we do is we have our center time the same time we have our guided reading groups.”

Participant 10 collaborates with her grade level colleagues four days a week to provide small group instruction through splitting the students by reading levels. With the help of a paraprofessional, Participant 10 works in small groups or individually with students on reading skills while the rest of the class engages in “seat centers” or “partner reading.” Participant 10 described meeting with the “lowest two groups” of students everyday and then meeting with the “high groups once a week.”

Participant 13 was the only participant who shared being uncomfortable with using small group instruction in her classroom despite knowing “it is good for the students to experience and learn to work together in groups.” Participant 13 described having a difficult time with small group instruction, because when she doesn’t “know exactly what’s going on” in each group, she does not feel comfortable teaching. Participant 13 believed most teachers implement the instructional methods they are most comfortable with and she thought of herself as more traditional in her teaching methods.

**Collaboration**

Twelve participants described activities involving peer tutoring or cooperative learning as the means of meeting the learning needs of students in their classroom. A number of the teachers specifically described pairing students with learning disabilities with higher functioning students. Participant 12 described using peer tutoring activities as the means to addressing the “discrepancy in skills” in her classroom in her statement, “I sometimes depend on my high students to help me reach everyone, you know, to be
my little co-teachers in the groups and so I do try to plan a lot like that.” Participant 14 uses the higher students to “help with those really low kids.” Participant 4 also shared a similar practice, “When we’re doing group work I try to pair somebody, a little bit better student with them.” Participant 5 explained how when she groups students, “there is always a strong student and a student that struggles in each group.”

Participant 8 shared how the students with disabilities in her classroom are more comfortable to ask questions in a small group instead of in front of the class, so that is one of the reasons she pairs “higher level students with the students with learning disabilities.” Participant 2 reflected in how she feels the higher students do a better job helping the students with disabilities than she can, “I use other kids to sit with them and partner up and help them. They seem to do a better job than I can.” Participant 12 uses math review games once a week and described the positive student response in her statement, “I can just sometimes see the light bulbs going off during the game when they’re interacting with other kids.” Participant 3 illustrated how she uses group work in her classroom to help the students with learning disabilities:

And I always make sure that when they’re with a group, because we do like I said, our books are ancient…they’re ancient, they’re old, so we read the lesson, but we go out and do our own thing on the lesson too, so we do a lot of group activities. A lot of group projects where they are researching and creating models and things and then they get up in front of the class and teach. So the people I do pair them up with I always make sure that they are really kind kids and kids that like to help and not criticize. You know that kind of a thing. Give them those strategy things of how you did it—not tell them the answer. And boy some of them really…and
then you get to know who’s really good at it and whose not and you use them a little bit more often.

*Whole Group Instruction*

Nine participants described whole group instruction as the main instructional practice used in their classroom. Participant 12 shared, “I would say that most of my instruction is the whole group but then going to group work or partners.” Whole group instruction was evident as the primary instructional practice in participant 11’s description of her teaching:

I’m pretty structured in my teaching. In fact I’m very structured in my teaching and it works well for me and in the type of students that I have it seems to be the best way to go where we sit at our desk and we get out a book. We oral read and so that covers all of the reading levels in the room which to the point where Kevin is a non reader and he’s getting very good about following along and knowing where we are and listening and he gets his information that way you know.

Participant 2’s description of her teaching also reflected the use of whole group instruction as the primary instructional practice:

I use the overhead a lot. I love the overhead. I make them stay right with me and do things and they have a notebook at their desk and lot of times I have them copy whatever I’m doing on the board so that they don’t get in trouble you know.

Two participants described the use of whole group class discussions as the means of addressing the learning needs in their classroom. Participant 4 stated her students with learning disabilities really like class discussions, because she has noticed the students
seem more comfortable to “ask questions.” Participant 15 shared her experience of having a busier and nosier classroom, because of her particular group of students are “active, but their discussions are good.”

**Strategy Instruction**

Strategy instruction was another method described by eight participants as the means to addressing the learning needs of students with learning disabilities in the classroom. With strategy instruction, teachers model and teach students different tools, methods, procedures, or techniques that enable students to complete a task successfully. The goal behind strategy instruction is for students to become independent learners (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). Some of the strategies described by the participants included: activating the student’s prior knowledge, decoding and comprehension strategies, mnemonics, and test-taking strategies.

Participant 12 described reading aloud to her class at the carpet and then modeling comprehension strategies like “inferring through thinking aloud” with her students. After modeling the comprehension strategy, Participant 12 has the students practice the strategy with their own book. Participant 5 shared how her reading instruction is completely strategy based. Participant 5 pushes her students to make “connections, summarize, and ask questions” and believes her students experience a great deal of success, because “there is no one answer.” Through strategy instruction, Participant 5 experiences more discussion in her classroom and she believes students have a “deeper understanding” of the content.
Participant 11 described activating her students’ prior knowledge at the start of a lesson through “brainstorming a list of everything the students know about the topic.” Participant 14 uses the reading programs, Structured Language and Guided Reading, as “two huge components that really work” for students with learning disabilities. Participant 14 believes these two reading programs give students the tools they need to be successful. Participant 14 shared how she explains the strategies to her students, “I told them (students) at the beginning of the year that their heads are toolboxes and I’m just here to fill them up with the tools that they can use for the rest of their lives.”

Participant 1 teaches her special education students “mnemonic devices” and other “fun ways to do things.” Participant 1 described spending “a lot of time talking test strategies” and helping students learn simple strategies like, “reading every question” and “checking answers” to help students be more successful on classroom assessments.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of instruction data, it was evident the participants as a whole described a variety of instructional practices. The instructional practices described by the participants were organized into five categories: (a) learning style instruction; (b) small group instruction; (c) collaboration; (d) strategy instruction; and (e) whole group instruction. The most discussed instructional strategies were learning style strategies, which included: hands-on activities, visual methods, and project-based learning. Small group instruction was the only instructional strategy discussed by all fifteen participants. Table 6 and the excerpts from the text clearly reveal a variety of instructional practices.
were described by the participants, but it is important to note the number of instructional practices described by individual participants only ranged from 3 to 6 strategies.

**Student Response**

During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share from their teaching experiences how students with learning disabilities in their classroom respond to their instruction. The participants were asked, “Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it. How did the students respond to the lessons? How did the students with disabilities respond? Describe the instructional approaches that you use most often. How do students respond to your instruction? How do the special education students respond to your instruction?” It was evident through analysis of the data, teachers use classroom observation to assess how students with disabilities respond to instruction in the general education classroom. The data also indicated that participating teachers believe that their students with learning disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom.

**Classroom Observation**

Instead of using tests, quizzes, or other formal types of assessments, the participants described using classroom observation as the means to assess how students with disabilities respond to their instruction in the general education classroom.

Three participants described how they observe student behavior when assessing students. Participant 2 shared, “Well you know like they just get a smile on their face and they go “I want to do well, that’s easy.” When they are, they get so excited about it
and they come up and they show you.” Participant 3 shared how she does not need a test to know if a student is successful or not, “… It’s just an instant thing. You don’t need a test to tell you if they succeeded or not. They know. Their face tells everything. When they’re not successful you figure out a way to make them learn.” Participant 5 described how she notices students with learning disabilities respond to classroom instruction through observing their behavior, “Some children that are really serious behavior problems aren’t anymore.”

A number of participants described observing classroom activities and assignments to monitor the student’s response to instruction. Participant 11 checks how her students with learning disabilities response to instruction through “question and answer and just our conversations and discussions.” Participant 4 described observing students through their work in class, “The basic way of success and measuring the success is how well they, you know, are able to complete the activities that we do, the worksheets and stuff and the tests.” When a student is not successful, Participant 4 gives her students another chance or alters the assignment, because as she stated, “you know they (the students) need to know the information.” Participant 13 shared a number of ways she uses classroom observation to assess her student’s progress:

Well I mean you know of course you have your basic daily work. You know their assignments and tests, those kinds of things. When they’re working on assignments or projects or whatever they are, just monitoring, you know walking around monitoring what they are doing. Seeing if they are actively involved or if they are just sitting back just letting someone else do the work if it’s a project. You know just looking over their shoulder, walking around the room. Math, for
instance, just kind of looking over their shoulder, seeing how they’re doing.

Sometimes I will again for instance in math you know I’ll let them, maybe we’ll do the first problem together and then I’ll let them do a few on their own and then I’ll say okay is there anybody who hasn’t gotten to number four yet?

Through classroom observation, Participant 7 described how she modifies her instruction to meet her student’s learning needs:

I know…I know and I can tell when I taught too many lessons where I’m just up in front talking that they’re getting bored and so you got to mix it up a little bit but you can kind of read them and you can say okay we’ve got change it, we’ve got to do something more fun. And I get better at it every year. You get more ideas every year as you teach. Then you can think of better ways to do. I know when I first taught I wasn’t like that.

Participant 6 described assessing her students with learning disabilities on an individual basis:

I usually try to assess them on an individual basis and it’s always hard for me when they are coming in because I really want to know where they are personally and trying to realize that you know maybe this one is only going to get to here but that’s still really success where they other one is going to soar. What I usually do of course in the core areas and we do the MEAP and we do all of that stuff…but usually I like my students to keep journals and so they can write to me and it’s a good way for me to say oh, man, she’s really off the mark, yeah she really has it and I’ll even do that in math where I might come in…you know we’re learning
improper fractions so I’ll throw one on the board and say okay, take out your journal.

*Positive Student Response*

Thirteen participants described students with learning disabilities responding positively to their instruction in the classroom and only one participant described negative student responses. It is important to note that only seven of the participants discussed student achievement or outcome data when describing how students with learning disabilities respond to their instruction. The other six participants described how the students with disabilities like or enjoy their instruction instead of describing student performance outcomes.

Five out of the seven participants described how their students with learning disabilities enjoy the hands-on instruction in their classroom.

Participant 2: “And science and they absolutely loved it. We did lots of hands on things and they thought that was the coolest thing.”

Participant 7: “Doing hands on things. And they like that. They like to be busy.”

Participant 1: “We made clay models….They just loved that. All the kids liked doing that. One little boy said, “This is the most fun I’ve ever had in science.”

Participant 9: “They’re not afraid to raise their hands.”

Participant 4: “And his mom had come back and said that he just loved my class, it was a stellar year.”
Participant 9 shared how her students with learning disabilities love to participate in her literacy stations, “They love that they get to come back here and do big books and use the little fly swatters or they love that they get to do the match frames or that they get to listen to the stories on tape.”

Seven participants were able to articulate more specific student outcome data when describing how students with learning disabilities respond to their instruction.

Participant 12 described an experience with a student with a learning disability who was “squirrely and had the messiest handwriting you could ever imagine” who responded well to praise. After getting an “A” on a test, participant 12 described her conversation with the student:

I will never forget when we had a big unit test like our first one in math, he got an “A” on and he came in and thanked me “Thank you for the A.” And I said no “thank you for the A” and he truly deserved it. Nothing was changed or modified. You know, he’s the first….we do accelerated reading reader olympics, and he’s my first one on the fourth marking period to have reached gold. So, it’s just amazing but he wants to please so much and it’s like if you know just give this kid a chance and he will just excel.

One participant described students with learning disabilities being successful in math class. Participant 15 described a student with a learning disability that no one thought could learn his multiplication facts, but through her instruction she described, “He’s learning his facts. Just like that and we just finished six weeks of geometry and he loved that.”
Four participants described how their students with learning disabilities were successful in reading. Participant 2 referred to the success her students with a learning disabilities experienced, “Oh my god. Some of the kids here just couldn’t read a word in the beginning…they have really taken off with the extra help.”

Participant 10 shared an experience about a student in her classroom with dyslexia who is successful using the Accelerated Reader program:

She’s at 124 percent already. I mean she just read, read, reads. And if she doesn’t understand it then she comes and asks me. Or she pairs with one of the others students and then they go out and read and it doesn’t affect her. She’s right there. She’s right there with us.

Participant 13 described a student who experienced good comprehension on materials despite “how poorly she reads.” Participant 1 uses vocabulary bingo to help students with learning disabilities prepare for a test and shared how “they almost all do very well on the vocabulary parts of the test.” Participant 14 described the reading growth a student with learning disabilities experienced in her classroom, “I had a student that moved here at the beginning of the year from Marquette and he could not even pass AB. He could not get a second grade. And he just passed the FG. It’s like YES! He finally did you know.”

Only one participant described students as not responding positively to instruction. Participant 1 shared how her students with learning disabilities enjoy class and her hands-on activities, but “they don’t do well on tests.” Participant 1 shared how she feels, “High functioning special education students by the time they are in fourth...
grade have been given so many accommodations that they come to expect it and they don’t try as hard.”

Conclusion

It was evident through analysis of the data, teachers use classroom observation to assess how students with disabilities respond to instruction in the general education classroom and believe that their students with learning disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom. Thirteen participants described students with learning disabilities as having a positive response to their instruction. Only seven out of the thirteen participants discussed student achievement or outcome data when describing how students respond to their instruction. The other six participants described how the students with disabilities like or enjoy their instruction instead of describing student performance outcomes.

Research Question 4

What supports and barriers do general education teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities?

After being asked the following questions, the teachers shared their experiences from memory, “What supports for students with disabilities do you have in your classroom? Can you think of a specific student with a disability that you had and tell me a story about your instructional experiences with the student?” The major themes that emerged from the data were: (a) a variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students
with learning disabilities; and (b) additional staff members and volunteers provide support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

**Barriers to Inclusion**

A variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students with learning disabilities. The barriers to inclusion described by the participants will be organized into four categories: (a) parents; (b) process barriers; (c) time; and (d) support. The participants in this study perceived parents to be the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students of learning disabilities in the classroom. The number of barriers discussed by the participants ranged from 0 to 2. Table 7 will further summarize the data.

Table 7. Barriers to Inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARENTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-lack of support</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-against special ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-transient population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-special ed. Process</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* T refers to the total number of participant responses.
Parents

A barrier to inclusion described most often by the participants was the lack of support from parents. Two participants described the challenges of parents who were against special education services or testing and five participants described the lack of involvement and participation in education by parents as barriers to inclusion for students with learning disabilities.

Participant 3 and 14 described the challenges of inclusion when parents do not want their child tested for special education services. Participant 3 shared a specific student experience from the previous school year that illustrated her frustration with parents.

Sometimes parents can be barriers. I had a couple of kids last year that they’ve been saying all along from kindergarten on teachers know. We work with them every day. We know. And the parents say, “I don’t want my kids tested, I don’t want my kids tested. I don’t want them.” You know you just keep going to the point where you’re hurting them. You’re hurting their self-esteem. You need to have them tested so that we can see if they qualify for services and if they need those services they should be able to get those services. We finally, I went through two students last year that we finally got them tested. They qualified and the parents said, “No, we don’t want any.” So they (parents) are barriers too.

Participant 14 described a similar frustration with parents not wanting their child tested for special education as “very difficult.” Participant 14 described how often parents do not understand how special education is different today than it was when they
were in school, “When they hear that special education label they think…..I mean when I was going through school the special education…..you were retarded and wore a helmet you know. And now it’s not that way anymore.”

Four participants described their frustration with the lack of parental support and participation in their classroom. Participant 11 referred to the attitude of parents in her community who have a different view of their role in their child’s education in her statement describing past comments from parents, “That it’s your job, Ms. S. It’s your job and you know don’t expect us to do anything at home. We’re busy people.”

Participant 5 described her students as coming, “from homes where there is no follow up or no partnership” and from her experience when there is support from home for school, “it really makes a difference.” Participant 4 described her students as receiving “no support from home” to help study, so she ends up letting her students use their books on assessments. Participant 1 shared how she suspects “a lot of LD kids are just lower I.Q.” and their main problem in school is not their learning disability, but that “nobody is working with them at home.” Participant 11 also described having little support from parents in her classroom except on class field trips.

Participant 8 discussed how a transient student population is a barrier to inclusion. Participant 8 reflected on the fact that “95 percent of her lower achieving or special education students” were new to the school this year and how the transient student population added additional challenges to her instruction and classroom.
Time

Seven participants expressed a lack of time as a barrier to inclusion. Participant 7 felt the lack of time in her classroom as the biggest barrier to inclusion, because as she described, “there are so many things to teach” and “it’s hard for those lower students, because you’re trying to hurry and you can’t hurry with them.” Participant 7 described wanting to give her special education students more “time and attention” but feeling the “need to move on” and “as a teacher you can’t always wait for them.” Participant 11 also described her frustration with a lack of time in the classroom, “I could sit with Kevin 24/7 and I just can’t. And I find myself getting so frustrated because he’s not getting it and I can’t help him.”

Participant 5 shared similar sentiments in regards to time as a barrier to inclusion, with her statement, “…they really need more than they are getting.” Participant 1 described her frustration with the lack of time in the classroom, “I just can’t find another five minutes in my day where I could sit and review with them.” Participant 11 found her district’s decision to reduce the number of school days to 170 as a challenge, because as she described, “It’s really causing havoc to me and the elementary end. Instructionally you know, we are just…you can’t throw another whole lesson into you know a thirteen minute addition on each day.”

Two participants described the challenges of scheduling services as a barrier to inclusion. Participant 6 described scheduling as “the biggest nightmare,” because she felt her students with learning disabilities “cannot afford to be out of the classroom,” but in order to get their individualized special education services they are pulled out of the general education classroom. Participant 9 shared how she wishes the special education
students could just stay in her classroom all day instead of leaving for their special education services. Participant 9 described herself as a “control freak” over her students, but she feels she is the “one who gets blamed if they don’t learn.” Participant 9 perceived the time her students are pulled from the classroom for therapy or special education services as a barrier due to the students missing good classroom instruction and activities as evidenced in the following statement:

Oh, I did this great lesson. They just missed it. You know what I mean, those on the spot things. You’re like, somebody will ask you a question, then you go off tangent for 35 minutes and then you realize that those kids weren’t there. You know like we’re teaching measurement and we’re having our fun with work with and everything and I’m like oh, I wish special ed. kids were in here when we are making the measurement man and the gallon man so then you’re like okay, I’ll just have to rearrange my schedule.

Process Barriers

A third barrier to inclusion discussed by two participants was the process of qualifying a student with a learning disability for special education services. Participant 13 shared how different philosophies of when to test students for a learning disabilities between staff members as a barrier to inclusion. Participant 13 shared how her school psychologist did not believe in testing students until third grade, but she saw a need for “testing done much earlier than that.” Participant 13 felt, “if the interventions are not working then you can see that there is a need for testing.” Although Participant 13 found the special education process frustrating, she stated, “I can see both sides where you
know the psychologist is saying, “You know every time a kid is doing poorly in school you want to test them.”

Participant 14 described having a great deal of “red tape” to go through before evaluating a student for special education services. Participant 14 was quite passionate about this topic and described in detail a situation she experienced with a student.

Participant 14 described this particular student as the “lowest student” she ever had in her classroom. The student’s “grammar was atrocious” and he didn’t know his “letters and numbers” when he started first grade. Participant 14 immediately started having student assistant meetings for the student and started some classroom interventions, but expressed a number of difficulties in her attempts to remediate the student’s deficits. Participant 14 described the situation as a difficult year, because “no matter what I taught I couldn’t get my instruction for him. It was always above him no matter what I did and I just don’t have time to focus on that one student very often.”

Despite Participant 14’s efforts the student was not tested for special education services, because the evaluation team believed the student was not “low enough for special education” and “the gap was not big enough” in first grade for the student to qualify for services. Participant 14 described how frustrating this process was for her and the student:

Because you have to teach to the group. Even you just have to teach to your class. You always teach the average student. And you make it a little slower. Sometimes I mean you…they’re really struggling…but this little guy could never fit him in. Everything was above where he was and you felt so bad for him because you could just see him looking at you and he was so lost when you were
teaching. And I would try to go slower but then if you went any slower, the rest of the class was gone and you lost them. So he was one of those students where you looked at and you’re thinking, you know what could I have done? What could I have changed? What more could I have done?

Participant 14 shared her belief in the need to get students who struggle interventions and services before they fail and her overall frustration with the process for special education:

He ended up qualifying in the end of second grade finally. Another whole year like that. And it was just so sad that the system works like that. But you can’t…and that’s our big fight out here is K-2 with the K-2 teachers out here. We’re always saying whether or not they are actually labeled special education and have an I.E.P. we can see who is struggling and we watch them day in and day out. If we could get them the extra help right away, whether they are labeled or not, we could do so much more with them when they got to third and fourth grade they wouldn’t be so far behind.

Another process barrier described by a participant involved the process of getting materials for a student with a learning disability. Participant 6 expressed her frustration with this process:

It’s irritating to me that I get a kid in September who might need the Franklin Speller or they might need a laptop because they don’t have any fine motor and it might be December, January, before they come around to say, oh does he really need it? And that happens. I’m not going to tell you a lot but often here because
money is so tight. The resources are limited and I’m like but what are we here for? So the lack of materials or the resources sometimes if very frustrating to me.

*Lack of Support*

Only three participants described having what they perceived as a lack of support for inclusion. Participant 2 described math as the “biggest barrier” due to a lack of “extra hands” to help students who struggle to learn concepts. Participant 3 described how recent financial cuts have affected her classroom, “You know there just aren’t enough warm bodies in there to help out with the kids…You know, no counselor. I mean there are just a lot of things we don’t have anymore that….it hurts.” Participant 8 explained how with having 26 students in her classroom the “special education students don’t get the attention they need.”

*Conclusion*

The participants in this study discussed seven different barriers that they experience with the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The barriers to inclusion described by the participants were organized into four categories: (a) parents; (b) process barriers; (c) time; and (d) support. The participants in this study perceived parents to be the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students of learning disabilities in the classroom. Although a variety of described barriers were evident in the data, it is important to note the number of barriers described by individual participants only ranged from 0 to 2 barriers and three participants did not describe any
barriers when discussing the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom.

**Supports**

The participants were asked to describe the supports for students with learning disabilities present in their classroom. Analysis of the data revealed, the participants perceived additional staff members and volunteers in the general education classroom as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The supports for inclusion described by the participants included: certified teachers, paraprofessionals, high school interns, parents, and senior volunteers. Table 8 will be used to further summarize the data.

Table 8. Supports for Inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL STAFF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-teachers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-paras</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOLUNTEERS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-HS students</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-parents</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-seniors</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. T refers to the total number of participant responses.*
Staff Members

Ten participants described how paraprofessionals help support inclusion in the general education classroom for students with learning disabilities.

Participant 1: “Luckily I have the one aide who’s with the one girl that’s very low and so she works with her, helps and the other boy who’s reading it below level.”

Participant 9: “When it comes time for publishing a book, usually what I do is send a couple that are lower with the paraprofessional and she works with two or three at a time.”

Participant 5: “I do have an adult helper (title I paraprofessionals) for I think it’s 50 minutes for math and about an hour for reading. Yeah. It’s very nice. And they’re both wonderful, wonderful women. Very patient and kind.”

Participant 8: “I have a para-pro that will be able to take out my lower struggling students on a particular topic not necessary everyday.”

Participant 11: “…then an aide comes in and helps the last 20 minutes but I’ve got one real severe student with a learning disabilities and a behavior student…”

Participant 13: “I have a Title I para-pro, so she’s support...She does pull out that one student, so I use her that way because she does give her (special ed. student) more intensive training.”

Participant 12: “I have a special ed. aide who comes in…. during various classes like for reading and language arts and spelling. She comes in and assists the other students who have special education services for those classes.”

Participant 12 described feeling “nervous” at the start of the school year and “self-conscious” teaching with a special education teacher or paraprofessional always in
her classroom. Participant 12 found that in time those feelings went away and she feels, “I get pretty much the support that I need and if I need anymore I feel very comfortable discussing it with the special education staff.” Participant 12 found her special education students need “a lot of assistance” in writing, so she arranged for a paraprofessional to come into the classroom everyday during writing time.

Participant 7 described the support she received from a paraprofessional 1-2 hours a day as “wonderful” and she has observed how the additional support has “made such a difference” with her students. Participant 6 was offered paraprofessional support at the start of the school year, but chose not to use the help in her classroom, because she described her class as “all pretty bright with only two struggling learners.” Participant 6 felt she had enough time to work with the two students who struggled and did not need paraprofessional support in her classroom.

Participant 3 discussed having Title I paraprofessionals for reading and math who work with students individually or in small groups. Participant 11 described having an Indian Education paraprofessional in her classroom during math class during centers as “an extra hand to help go around and help or if there are kids that are struggling with money, or time, or whatever it is.” Participant 9 described herself as having “been very lucky” in always having a Title I paraprofessional when she teaches reading. Participant 7 expressed the benefits of having three students who are low readers pulled from the classroom to receive reading interventions with a paraprofessional 30 minutes a day.

The participants also described certified teachers as additional supports for inclusion. Teaching staff described by the participants included: title I teachers, reading teachers and tutors, literacy coaches, and special education teachers.
Participant 10: “The teacher (Title I) comes in every afternoon for about 30 minutes.”

Participant 6: “This year we had a Title I teacher and it’s perfect because she’s a teacher. I took my three kids that needed the most help. They go for 20 minutes a day for intensiveness. Probably only six kids in the group so it’s perfect.”

Participant 2: “The (LD teacher) gives me extra materials for them to do in class when we’re doing the regular math.”

Participant 1: “The ones that are truly L.D. of course go to the special rooms, but we also have something in our building we now call math and reading interventions which they’ve hired, what do you call them, tutors….who work with kids on their math facts…”

Participant 4: “We have a Title I but her time is limited. She only has like 30 minutes and 25 minutes for fourth grade.”

Participant 12: “I have the special education teacher in here at that time so she really helps me. I’ll say to her “This group over here you know, watch them you know, they’re not getting it.” So, it’s nice to have another body in there to work with her.”

In Participant 11’s classroom, “the special education students go down to the resource room and work on specific skills with the special education teacher” at the end of the school day. With the special education teacher, the students “practice spelling with modified spelling lists” and concepts the teacher did not have time to cover with the students in her classroom.

Participant 15 described how she utilizes her Title I teacher to help support instruction in her classroom throughout the week. “Early in the week, the Title I
instructor comes into the classroom and works with the entire group” on a reading lesson. Then the Title I teacher pulls out small groups of students three days a week for “special reading instruction.” On Fridays, she targets students in math who are “having difficulties in certain areas” and she works one-to-one with the students.

Participant 12 described how if “students who receive special services ever need extra assistance with something” she can send them down to the resource room to work with the special education teacher. Participant 12 described her special education teacher and paraprofessionals as being “very flexible and willing” to help in the classroom or resource room. Participant 2 described an intervention program where “three part-time certified teachers” work with students identified for needing help in reading. Participant 2 described how helpful it is to have the additional support, because the teachers can really “focus” on the student’s needs and “keep track” of their progress.

Due to Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (Miblisi), grade level meetings are a common practice in many schools in Michigan, but Participant 2 was the only teacher who mentioned the support she receives from the grade level meetings. Participant 2 described working with the literacy coaches as “great” and discussed the benefits of having time to look at student data and discuss reading interventions with her colleagues. Together the general education teacher and literacy coaches plan their instruction and support for students in the classroom.

Participant 12 discussed how talking to other teachers and her mentor teacher helps her teaching. Participant 14 described talking with her grade level teaching partner all day long discussing student problems and different ways to teach as a huge support for her and the students in her classroom. Participant 7 described how meetings with other
teachers and consultants from the intermediate school district has made a “huge difference” for the K-2 students, because during the meetings the team looks at student data and discusses the teaching practices and support needed in the classroom.

When asked where she learned her instructional approaches to teaching in an inclusive classroom participant 2 shared, “Well I’ve taken a lot of classes and I’ve learned from a lot of good teachers.” Participant 2 described having a “wealth of information” within her school district and not needing to bring in experts from the outside, because she found it more beneficial for teachers in her school to teach each other. Participant 2 credited her colleagues for helping her teach students with learning disabilities in her statement, “Thank god for your peers and other teachers that you know who you learn from and get their ideas.”

Volunteers

Ten participants described how volunteers help support inclusion in their classroom through working with individual students or small groups of students. Parents, high school students, and grandparents were the types of volunteers described by the participants. It is interesting to note the volunteer support described most often by the participants were high school student volunteers.

Five participants described high school student volunteers as providing support for inclusion for students with learning disabilities. Participant 5 described having three high school helpers as “really great kids” who read with students and often help special education students study for a test. Participant 14 described having a high school intern during her math instruction for over an hour everyday. The high school intern is able to
work with groups of students who are struggling, which frees up Participant 14 to work with other small groups of students. Participant 14 described this type of volunteer support as “wonderful” and she feels very lucky to have this support in her classroom.

Participants 4, 12 and 11 also described having high school aides who work with small groups of students in their classrooms. Participant 12 shared, “I’ve had really good experiences with these students. The first one I had this year was outstanding, so natural with the kids. She would help a lot with my students with special needs.”

Only three participants described parent volunteers who help support inclusion in their classroom. Depending on what the class is studying, Participant 12 described having a parent who comes in once a week to help with reading groups and centers. Participant 9 described having two parent volunteers who volunteer their time two days a week to work with students who are struggling in the classroom. Participant 9 believes having the parent volunteers in her classroom to work with the low readers “makes a big difference” and feels “spoiled” by all their support this school year. Participant 5 was the last participant who described parent volunteers who work with small groups of students in her classroom, but described the support as not being consistent.

Two participants described senior volunteers who help support inclusion in their classroom. Participant 15 described a foster grandmother who works with students one-on-one as “fantastic.” Participant 2’s school participates in a program that arranges for “older people to read with the kids” and one senior volunteer comes in everyday to read with students.
Conclusion

Through the analysis of the data, it is evident that the participating teachers value having support staff and volunteers in their classrooms. The teachers described how additional staff members and volunteers provide support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities to be successful in the general education classroom through working individually or with small groups of students. The types of supports for inclusion described by the participants included: certified teachers, paraprofessionals, high school interns, parents, and senior volunteers. An interesting phenomenon that emerged from the data was the participants did not describe training, materials, or specific instructional programs as support for inclusion. Instead staff members or volunteers were described as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the classroom.

Research Question 5

Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a high percentage of special education students? Do different themes emerge from the first four questions with schools with a low percentage of special education students?

In order to answer research question five, the researcher examined the themes from the study in regards to the participants’ special education population. When interpreting these findings it is important to remember that the researcher was not able to interview an even number of teachers from schools with high special education populations and schools with low special education populations. Nine of the participants in this study taught in school districts where the special education population is
considered high (15 percent or more) due to being above the state average (14.4 percent) and six participants taught in school districts with average or low special education populations (less than 15 percent).

Table 9. Participant Responses to the Themes of this Study by the Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers respond to students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Additional staff members and volunteers provide the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students with learning disabilities.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most teachers plan instruction in isolation.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students with disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

How do general education teachers describe how they respond to having special education students in their classroom?

Through analysis of the data, it was evident general education classroom teachers respond to having students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations. When comparing the
participant’s responses, it revealed 32 of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and only 13 responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Participants who taught at schools with high special education populations described on average 3.5 accommodations and participants who taught at schools with low special education populations described on average 2.1 accommodations. Table 10 further summarizes this data.

Table 10. Participant Responses to Students with Learning Disabilities in their Classrooms by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Responses</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of differences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response Accommodations</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shorten assignments</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- different expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- scribe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- extra time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Accommodations</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- test read</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- copy of notes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- books on tape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- larger print</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2

How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for all their students? How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for special education students?

Two themes emerged from the data: (a) most teachers plan instruction in isolation; and (b) a variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods. When analyzing these themes in regards to the special education population in the participant’s schools, it revealed that out of the 15 responses to planning instruction in isolation, three of the participants were from schools with low special education populations and 12 of the responses were from participants with high special education populations. Although more participants from high special education populations described planning instruction in isolation, more of these participants also described planning instruction with their colleagues. Five out of the six participants who described planning instruction with a colleague were from schools with high special education populations. Table 11 further summarizes this data.

Table 11. Instruction Planning by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction Planning</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning Instruction in Isolation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Instruction with Colleague</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining the participant’s factors that influence their instructional methods, it revealed no differences between high and low special education populations. Eighteen of the instructional responses were from participants who taught at schools with...
high special education populations and fourteen of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Table 12 further summarizes this data.

Table 12. Factors Described by Participants when Planning Instruction by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Student Attention</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student abilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End in Sight</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 3

What specific instructional strategies do general education teachers describe as their means of addressing the needs of students in their classrooms? How do general education teachers describe the way special education students respond to those instructional strategies?

Two themes emerged from the data in this area: (a) teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom; and (b) teachers believe students with disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom. When comparing the participants’ instructional responses, it revealed 44 of the responses were from
participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and 27 responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Even though the total number of instructional responses was higher from participants who taught in schools with high special education populations, when averaging the instructional strategies between the two groups it revealed participants from schools with high special education populations described on average 4.8 instructional strategies and participants from schools with low special education populations described on average 4.5 instructional strategies. Table 13 further summarizes this data.

Thirteen participants described their students with learning disabilities as having positive experiences in their classroom. When comparing the participants’ responses, it revealed seven of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and six responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations.

Research Question 4

What supports and barriers do general education teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities?

Two themes emerged from the data in this area: (a) a variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students with learning disabilities; and (b) additional staff members and volunteers in the general education classroom provide the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities.
Table 13. Instructional Practices Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practices</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING STYLES</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hands-on</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-visual</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-projects</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMALL GROUP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLABORATION</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-peer tutoring</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-cooperative learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOLE GROUP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the participants’ barriers to inclusion responses, it revealed 16 of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and four of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Participants who taught at schools with high special education populations described on average 2.9 barriers to inclusion and participants who taught at schools with low special education populations described on average 1.6 barriers. Table 14 further summarizes this data.
Table 14. Barriers to Inclusion Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Inclusion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARENTS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- lack of support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- against special ed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- transient population</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCESS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- special ed. Process</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- materials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the analysis of the data it was evident additional staff members and volunteers provide support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities to be successful in the general education classroom through working individually or in small groups with students. Participants with high special education populations on average described more supports for inclusion (4.2) than participants with low special education populations (3.1). Table 15 further summarizes this data.
Table 15. Supports to Inclusion Described by the Participants by Special Education Population of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL STAFF</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-teachers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-paraprofessionals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOLUNTEERS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-high school students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-seniors</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Analyzing the data in regards to the participants’ special education population allowed for additional analysis of the study and revealed some interesting findings. Participants from schools with high special education populations described facing more barriers to inclusion, but they also described more supports for inclusion than participants from schools with low special education populations. Both groups of participants described on average a similar number of instructional strategies, but differed in the number of accommodations they provide in the classroom for students with learning disabilities. The participants from schools with high special education populations described providing more accommodations for students with learning disabilities in the classroom than participants with low special education populations.
Summary of the Findings

This study explored the experiences of general education teachers and how they view and interpret their instructional planning, strategies, supports, and barriers when teaching students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Data were collected through fifteen in-depth interviews with teachers from across Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. After seven rounds of data analysis and reduction, seven strong themes from the participants were identified: (a) teachers use a variety of instructional practices in the classroom; (b) teachers respond to students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance of student differences and classroom accommodations; (c) additional staff members and volunteers provide the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom; (d) a variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods; (e) a variety of barriers to inclusion are present for students with learning disabilities; (f) most teachers plan instruction in isolation; and (g) teachers believe students with disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom.

The variety of instructional strategies and accommodations described by the participants were the strongest two themes that emerged from this study. Despite a variety of instructional practices and accommodations evident in the data as a whole, the number of instructional practices and accommodations described by individual participants ranged from only 1 to 6 strategies.

The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was the curriculum. Although a number of participants described thinking of their students’ learning styles and abilities when planning instruction, the participants did
not specifically describe thinking of their special education students when planning instruction. Most of the participants’ descriptions revealed teachers thinking of the whole group or the learning styles of most of the class versus individual students when planning instruction. Through the data analysis it was also evident most teachers plan instruction in isolation. Only six participants described planning instruction with their colleagues and none of the participants described planning instruction with the special education teacher.

Thirteen participants described students with learning disabilities as having a positive response to their instruction, but only seven out the thirteen participants discussed student achievement or outcome data when describing how students respond to their instruction. The other six participants described how the students with disabilities like or enjoy their instruction instead of describing student performance outcomes.

This study found additional staff members and volunteers provide the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities to be successful in the general education classroom through working individually or with small groups of students. The participants in this study perceived parents to be the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students of learning disabilities in the classroom. Although a variety of barriers were evident in the data, the number of barriers described by individual participants only ranged from 0 to 2 barriers and three participants did not describe any barriers when discussing the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom.

Lastly, the researcher analyzed the data in regards to the participants’ special education population in order to view the data through another lens for additional
analysis. This analysis found participants from schools with high special education populations described facing more barriers to inclusion, but they also described more supports for inclusion than participants from schools with low special education populations. Both groups of participants described on average a similar number of instructional strategies, but differed in the number of accommodations they provide in the classroom for students with learning disabilities. The participants from schools with high special education populations described providing more accommodations for students with learning disabilities than participants with low special education populations.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the study and to make concluding statements. This study explored the experiences of general education teachers and how they view and interpret their instructional planning, strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. This chapter will: (a) review the purpose and methodology of the study; (b) summarize the findings of the study; (c) present the conclusions; and lastly (d) describe recommendations for further research.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore and analyze how general education teachers describe and interpret the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. In addition this study investigated what supports and barriers teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities. This study investigated the deeper perspectives of general education teachers through face-to-face interactions using a qualitative research design. In qualitative research, the researcher learns from participants to understand the meaning of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and it seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of human experience (Newton & Rudestam, 2001). The method used for this study was phenomenological, where the actual experiences of general education teachers about the phenomenon, instruction for students with disabilities, was examined
in detail in order to obtain a description of the “essence” of teaching in inclusive classrooms (Creswell, 2003).

This study collected data using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to better understand general education teachers’ deeper perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about their instructional strategies (Rudestram & Newton, 2001). The researcher used open-ended questions, so the participants could represent their views and perspectives in their own words and terms, in addition to taking the questions in any direction that they chose (Patton, 1990).

Purposive criterion sampling was employed in order to interview teachers who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information. The researcher selected nine of the participants from schools with high special education populations (15 percent or more) and six of the participants from schools with low special education populations (less than 15 percent). The researcher was interested in this sample in order to explore and compare the themes that developed between schools with differing special education populations.

Through an emergent data analysis process following Marshall and Rossman’s (2006) seven phases of data analysis, the researcher examined and interpreted the data to find significance and meaning in the teachers’ instructional experiences. The researcher pulled salient themes, reoccurring ideas, and patterns of belief that resonated collectively throughout the interviews. After seven rounds of data analysis and reduction, seven themes from the participants were identified. Through using a phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to understand and describe the experiences of general education teachers and how they view and interpret their instructional planning,
strategies, and outcomes when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Review of the Research Questions

The findings of the study were based on the analysis of the data presented in Chapter IV. In the next section, research questions 1-4 will be restated followed by the findings to this study. The findings from research question 5 where the different themes that emerged from the first four research questions were examined in regards to schools with high special education percentages and schools with low special education percentages will be discussed within the findings of research questions 1-4.

Research Question 1

How do general education teachers describe how they respond to having special education students in their classroom?

During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share from their experiences of having special education students in their classroom. The participants shared 45 responses in regards to how they respond when students with learning disabilities are in their classroom. The participants’ views and perspectives towards teaching students with learning disabilities were interpreted through their specific statements of acceptance of student differences and their descriptions of classroom accommodations to address those differences.

An interesting finding from this study was the lack of negative responses to students with learning disabilities from the participants. The participants did not express negative student experiences or any beliefs that students with disabilities should not be in
their classroom. Through examining the descriptions of the participants’ teaching practices and experiences, it was evident all the participating teachers were open and accepting of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. Five general education teachers specifically articulated their acceptance of student differences. These five participants expressed a desire for students with learning disabilities to feel a part of their classroom. The researcher included the participants’ experiences in the findings of the study due to the richness of the participants’ responses and depth of acceptance for student differences as evidenced in Chapter IV.

All the participants described accommodations they provide to students with learning disabilities as part of how they respond when students with learning disabilities are in their classroom. Accommodations in how students respond to assignments or class activities were the most common type of accommodation described by the participants, followed by presentation accommodations. All the participants described shortening assignments for students with learning disabilities.

Despite a variety of accommodations evident in the data as a whole, the number of accommodations described by individual participants ranged from only 1 to 5 accommodations. It was more common for the participants to accommodate an activity that was designed for the whole class in terms of quantity, duration, or time allotments than to provide differentiated activities for students with learning disabilities. There was little evidence the participants routinely used tiered assignments or differentiated learning activities to address the different instructional levels in their classroom. Also, when discussing accommodations, none of the participants referred to the accommodations stated in their student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
When comparing the participants’ responses in regards to special education population of the school, it revealed 32 of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and only 13 responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Participants who taught at schools with high special education populations described on average 3.5 accommodations and participants who taught at schools with low special education populations described on average 2.1 accommodations. It is reasonable to assume that more accommodations are provided in classrooms of schools with higher special education populations due to more students with disabilities being present in those classrooms than schools with low special education populations.

Although the participants from this study interpreted their response to students with learning disabilities in their classroom through acceptance and accommodations, the researcher considered the number of accommodations described per participant to be relatively low. Moreover, the types of accommodations mentioned by most of the participants indicate a strong reliance on simply modifying lessons and expectations in terms of quantity, duration, and time allotments. Indications of true differentiation for variations in learning style, learning modalities, or other learner differences were noticeably absent from the data from these participants. This absence and reliance on changing quantity of expectations or time allotments indicate that the general education teachers may have a limited repertoire of differentiating strategies and may need additional training and professional development to differentiate in ways that better accommodate student learning differences.
Research Question 2

How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for all their students? How do general education teachers describe their thinking when planning instruction for special education students?

During the in-depth interviews, all fifteen teachers were given the opportunity to share their instruction planning process. Analysis of the data revealed a variety of factors influence a teacher’s selection of instructional methods and teachers plan instruction in isolation.

Fifteen responses gave evidence to teachers planning instruction in isolation. The majority of the participants described planning instruction after school hours, during the evenings, or on the weekends, in addition to during the school day. The participants in this study interpreted their instruction planning as meeting the needs in their classroom. The participants did not express any feelings of needing additional training, time, or support to plan instruction for students with learning disabilities. The participants also did not interpret planning instruction in isolation as a problem.

Only six participants described planning instruction with their colleagues. Out of the six descriptions from the participants, only three participants really planned instruction with a colleague. The other three participants described switching students for different subjects to share the workload of planning instruction, but there was little evidence of collaboration to plan instructional activities. Overall, the six participants were very positive about the benefits of planning instruction with their colleagues, but the
reasons appeared to be related more to sharing the workload than due to an increase in student outcomes or improving instructional practices in the classroom.

A concerning finding that emerged from the data was the lack of instructional planning with the special education teacher. None of the participants described planning instruction with a special education teacher and only one participant expressed an interest in collaborating with the special education teacher to plan instruction.

Analysis of the instruction planning data revealed a variety of factors influenced the participants’ thinking and selection of instructional methods. These factors were organized into seven categories: (a) curriculum; (b) attention; (c) student abilities; (d) whole group planning; (e) learning styles; (f) time; and (g) end in sight planning. The number of factors individual participants described ranged from 0 to 5. The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was the curriculum.

Although a number of participants described thinking of their students’ learning styles and abilities when planning instruction, the participants did not specifically describe thinking of their special education students when planning instruction. Most of the participants’ descriptions revealed teachers thinking of the whole group or the learning styles of most of the class versus individual students when planning instruction.

One of the basic principles to good teaching is how classroom assessments provide the necessary information for planning instruction (Ysseldyke, 2001), but not one participant from this study discussed using assessment data to plan their instruction. The participants did discuss using small group instruction with students that they noticed needed extra help, but the participants did not articulate using student data to plan their small group instruction. Curriculum was the most common factor described as
influencing the participants’ thinking when planning instruction. The participants in this study did not describe using student assessment data to plan their instruction.

When analyzing the themes from this research question in regards to the special education population in the participants’ schools, it revealed that out of the 15 responses to planning instruction in isolation, three of the participants were from schools with low special education populations and 12 of the responses were from participants with high special education populations. Although more participants from high special education populations described planning instruction in isolation, more of these participants also described planning instruction with their colleagues. Five out of the six participants who described planning instruction with a colleague were from schools with high special education populations.

The participants in this study interpreted their instruction planning as meeting the needs in their classroom. The participants did not express any feelings of needing additional training or support to plan instruction for students with learning disabilities. The participants also did not interpret planning instruction in isolation as a problem. The six participants who did describe some level of collaboration to plan instruction were very positive about the benefits of planning instruction with their colleagues, but the reasons appeared to be more because of sharing the workload than due to an increase in student outcomes. The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction planning was curriculum. Although a number of participants described thinking of their students’ learning styles and abilities when planning instruction, the participants did not specifically describe thinking of their special education students
when planning instruction. The participants in this study did not describe using student assessment data to plan their instruction.

Research Question 3

What specific instructional strategies do general education teachers describe as their means of addressing the needs of students in their classrooms? How do general education teachers describe the way special education students respond to those instructional strategies?

Through the analysis of instruction data, it was evident the participants as a whole described a variety of instructional practices. The instructional practices described by the participants were organized into five categories: (a) learning style instruction; (b) small group instruction; (c) collaboration; (d) strategy instruction; and (e) whole group instruction. The most discussed instructional strategies were learning style strategies, which included: hands-on activities, visual methods, and project-based learning. Although whole group instruction was the least discussed practice by the participants, it was still described by nine participants as being their main instructional approach to teaching in the classroom.

The one instructional strategy discussed by all the participants was small group instruction. It was evident the participants used small group instruction as the means to provide more individualized instruction to students with learning disabilities. Most of the small group instruction described by the participants was in the area of reading. It was evident the participants were comfortable leveling their students in the area of reading and providing small group instruction. When small group instruction was discussed in
the other content areas, it was not a common occurrence and was used mainly for remedial instruction.

Although the participants described a variety of instructional practices, the number of instructional practices described by individual participants ranged only from 3 to 6 strategies. Also, a number of research based instructional practices for inclusion that were discussed in the literature review such as peer tutoring (Fuch & Fuch, 1997; Elbaum, et al, 2000; Mercer & Mercer, 2001) and strategy instruction (Deshler, et al., 2001; Schumaker & Deshler, 1995) were not common practices described by the participants. Lastly, none of the participants described using co-teaching in their classroom (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991; Klinger et al., 1998; Margiera & Zigmond, 2005).

An important element missing from the participants’ instructional descriptions was assessment. The participants did not relate their instructional practices to any type of student assessment. This lack of student assessment data was also evident when the participants were asked to describe how their students with learning disabilities respond to their instruction. The participants described using classroom observation to assess how students with learning disabilities respond to instruction in the general education classroom, but they did not describe using any formal types of assessment.

Through the participants’ descriptions of their classroom observations, it was evident the teachers believe their students with learning disabilities have positive experiences in the general education classroom. Thirteen participants described students with learning disabilities having a positive response to their instruction, but only seven out the thirteen participants discussed student achievement or outcome data when
describing how students respond to their instruction. The other six participants described how the students with disabilities like or enjoy their instruction instead of describing student performance outcomes.

When comparing the participants’ instructional responses in regards to special education population, it revealed 44 of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and 27 responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Even though the total number of instructional responses was higher from participants who taught in schools with high special education populations, when averaging the instructional strategies between the two groups it revealed participants from schools with high special education populations described on average 4.8 instructional strategies and participants from schools with low special education populations described on average 4.5 instructional strategies.

The participants in this study interpreted their instructional practices in their classroom as meeting their students’ needs. The participants did not express any feelings of not knowing how to help their students with learning disabilities learn or any concerns about their instructional practices. Nine participants described whole group instruction as being their main instructional approach to teaching in the classroom and all the participants described using small group instruction in their classroom. Despite a variety of instructional approaches in the data as a whole, the number of instructional strategies discussed per participant was relatively small. Also, the instructional practices, peer tutoring, and strategy instruction, which were found in the literature review to be highly effective for students with learning disabilities were not frequently described by the
participants. Lastly, the research-based instructional practices: explicit instruction, team teaching, frequent monitoring and feedback, and using student assessment to guide instruction, were not mentioned by the participants in this study. As with the previously discussed findings, this may suggest an area of needed professional development for general education teachers who seem to rely heavily on a very limited range of instructional practices and on informal observation to determine how well their students are responding to instruction.

Research Question 4

What supports and barriers do general education teachers describe when planning instruction for students with disabilities?

The participants in this study discussed seven different barriers they experience with inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The barriers to inclusion described by the participants were organized into four categories: (a) parents; (b) process barriers; (c) time; and (d) support.

The participants in this study perceived parents to be the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students of learning disabilities in the classroom. Two participants described the challenges of parents who were against special education services or testing and five participants described the lack of involvement and participation in education by parents as barriers to inclusion for students with learning disabilities.

Although a variety of barriers were evident in the data, it is important to note the number of barriers described by individual participants only ranged from 0 to 2 barriers
and three participants did not describe any barriers when discussing the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in their classroom.

When comparing the participants’ barriers to inclusion responses, it revealed 16 of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with high special education populations and four of the responses were from participants who taught at schools with low special education populations. Participants who taught at schools with high special education populations described on average 2.9 barriers to inclusion and participants who taught at schools with low special education populations described on average 1.6 barriers.

The participants perceived additional staff members and volunteers in the general education classroom as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities through working individually or in small groups with students. The supports for inclusion described by the participants included: certified teachers, paraprofessionals, high school interns, parents, and senior volunteers. Paraprofessionals were described as the staff member providing the most support for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom. Only five participants discussed the special education teacher as a support for inclusion. The participants described sending the students with disabilities to the resource room for extra help and did not describe the special education teacher as providing support in the general education classroom.

The participants did not describe any training, materials, or specific instructional programs as support for inclusion. Instead staff members or volunteers were described as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the classroom. Participants with high special education populations on average described
more supports for inclusion (4.2) than participants with low special education populations (3.1).

It was evident the participants appreciated and valued the additional support provided through staff members or volunteers being present in their classroom. The extra hands in the classroom allowed the participants to help individual students or provide more small group instruction, but, again, the general education teachers are thinking in terms of supports that allow them to maintain a limited repertoire of differentiation strategies by simply increasing the adult to student ratio in the classroom. Additionally, the participants in this study did not see the special education teachers as a special source of assistance or guidance in planning for the needs of special education students. Finally, an interesting finding that emerged from this study is how the participants perceived parents to be their biggest barrier to inclusion rather than emphasizing a lack of support, training or materials to serve their students’ needs.

Conclusions

The conclusions from this study will be organized into four sections. Section one will review the importance of this study. Section two will discuss the participants’ interpretation of their instruction planning and practices, in addition to the participants’ perspectives in regards to student outcomes, barriers, and supports for inclusion. In section three, the researcher will share her interpretations and conclusions from the study. Lastly, section four will discuss recommended areas of future training for general education teachers of inclusion that emerged from the study. Throughout the review of
the conclusions, the researcher will discuss how the findings from this study either support or contradict other studies of inclusion from the literature review.

**Importance of Study**

We have learned in recent years that it is not the placement in the general education classrooms that makes the difference for students with disabilities, but it is the instructional strategies used by general education teachers (King-Sears, 1997; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Zigmond, 2003; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). In the last two decades, considerable progress has been made in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective interventions for students with learning disabilities. Although the research on effective instruction is abundant, studies continue to reveal general education teachers minimally change their instruction when students with disabilities are present (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Schumm et al., 1995).

After more than thirty years of educating students with disabilities in the public schools, educators continue to struggle with how to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Numerous studies have revealed there is a gap between the research on effective instruction and actual classroom practice, but few studies have explored the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Little is known about how general education teachers plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. This study explored how general education teachers describe the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms when teaching students with disabilities. Since general education teachers make daily instructional decisions for the
education of children with disabilities, their experiences provide valuable information about what is needed for successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

The significance of this study is clearly validated in light of recent federal legislation. Due to NCLB, teachers are now held accountable for the education of students with disabilities in their classroom like never before. No longer are students with disabilities just visiting the general education classroom. NCLB requires that all children be tested in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math and that schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress, including students with disabilities. Also, the reauthorization of IDEIA stresses the use of scientific based interventions in the general education classroom to ensure students’ learning difficulties are not due to a lack of adequate instruction.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the phenomenon of teaching and planning instruction for students with disabilities from the general education teachers’ perspective in order improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

_Perspectives of the Participants_

Participants were asked guiding questions in order to investigate their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives in regards to planning instruction for students with learning disabilities. It was evident the participants in this study interpreted their instruction planning as meeting the needs in their classroom. The participants did not express any feelings of needing additional training or support to plan instruction for students with
learning disabilities. Only one participant expressed frustration with the time it takes to plan good instruction.

All the participants in this study described planning most of their instruction in isolation. The participants were comfortable with planning instruction and did not interpret planning instruction in isolation as a problem or barrier to inclusion. Only six participants described planning instruction in collaboration with a colleague. The six participants were very positive about the benefits of planning instruction with their colleagues, but the reasons appeared to be due more to sharing the workload of instruction planning than due to an increase in student outcomes. None of the participants described collaborating with the special education teacher to plan instruction.

Although the teachers in this study were comfortable with planning instruction in isolation for students with learning disabilities, the research clearly supports the benefits of teachers collaborating to plan instruction through co-teaching. Pugach and Johnson (1995) in a three year study of teacher collaboration, found teachers who received collaboration training significantly decreased their number of referrals to special education and became more confident in teaching students with learning needs and problems. Cook and Friend (1996) suggest with co-teaching students receive a wider range of instructional approaches and have a lower student to teacher ratio due to having two teachers in the classroom at the same time. Margiera and Zigmond (2005) found students with disabilities received more individual instruction with co-teaching.

The participants in this study did not interpret their planning of instruction in isolation as a problem. There is a need to increase general education teachers’ awareness
and understanding of the benefits of collaborating to plan instruction for students with learning disabilities.

*Instructional Strategies for Inclusion*

The participants in this study interpreted the instructional practices in their classroom as meeting their students’ needs. As a whole, the participants described a variety of instructional practices that they use in their classroom. The participants did not express any feelings of not knowing how to teach students with learning disabilities or any concerns about the instructional practices they use in their classroom to teach students with learning disabilities. These findings contradict other studies that have found regular education teachers perceive themselves to be unprepared to teach children with disabilities (deBrettencourt, 1999; Gately & Hammer, 2005; Salvia & Munson, 1986; Schumm & Vaughn, 1991; Titone, 2005; Welch, 1996) and lack confidence to fulfill tasks needed to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Buell et. al, 1999). The teachers in this study did not express concerns with their teaching practices or abilities, nor did they interpret their instructional practices as needing further growth and development.

*Acceptance of Students with Learning Disabilities*

Through the descriptions of the participants’ teaching practices and experiences, all the participants implied acceptance of students with learning disabilities in their classroom and described classroom accommodations they provide to address student differences. Five general education teachers in particular specifically described their
acceptance of student differences and a desire for students with learning disabilities to feel a part of the classroom. Lacking from the participant’s perspectives of inclusion were any negative responses to students with learning disabilities in their classroom. The participants did not express any negative perceptions or attitudes in regards to teaching students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.

Accommodations

All the participants described accommodations they provide to students as part of how they respond when students with learning disabilities are in their classroom. Accommodations in how students respond to assignments or class activities were the most common type of accommodation described by the participants, followed by presentation accommodations. All the participants described shortening assignments for students with learning disabilities.

The participants described a variety of accommodations as a whole and they did not express any concerns about their ability to provide accommodations or their knowledge in making modifications for students with learning disabilities. The participants interpreted their accommodations as meeting the needs of their students. These findings contradict with other studies that have found general educators felt a lack of preparation in planning and implementing instructional adaptations for students with disabilities (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). Schumm and Vaughn (1991) found in their studies that most general education teachers are willing to include students with disabilities in the physical context of their classroom, but are less willing to make instructional changes or modifications to their materials or environment for students with
disabilities. In this study, the participants did not describe any unwillingness to make accommodations for their students or any concerns in their abilities to provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

**Supports to Inclusion**

The participants in this study were asked to describe their supports for inclusion. The participants described additional staff members and volunteers in the classroom as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The extra hands in the classroom allowed the participants to help individual students or provide more small group instruction. Recent research supports many benefits of more small group instruction in the classroom. Small group instruction allows for more teacher-student interactions, individualized instruction, student on-task behavior, and teacher monitoring and feedback (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000). Organizing students into small groups by instructional needs can be highly effective, because it allows students with disabilities to benefit from intensive and targeted instruction (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLesky, 2008).

**Barriers to Inclusion**

An interesting finding from this study is how the participants perceived parents to be their biggest barrier to inclusion and not a lack of support, training, or materials. Only two participants described a lack of support in the classroom as a barrier to inclusion. This finding also contradicts other studies of inclusion. Scruggs and Mastropieri’s (1996) investigation of general education teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion and mainstreaming
since 1958, found teachers have expressed a need for expanded sources of support, more time to plan for students with disabilities, reduced class size, and ongoing training in serving students with disabilities. The participants in this study did express a need for more time, but it was not to plan instruction. The participants expressed a desire for additional time in order to work directly with students. Only one teacher expressed class size as a barrier to inclusion and none of the teachers expressed a need for more training for teaching students with learning disabilities.

Conclusion on Participants’ Interpretations

This study found general education teachers perceive their instructional planning and strategies meet the needs of their students with learning disabilities. The participants did not express needing additional training, collaboration with colleagues, or assistance to plan or provide instruction and accommodations. The participants interpreted additional staff members and volunteers as providing the most support for inclusion and parents as the biggest barrier to the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The participating teachers’ lack of awareness of the need to expand and improve their instructional practices when teaching students with disabilities is a finding that emerged from this study.

Researcher’s Interpretations and Findings from Study

If the population who participated in this study is a trend, it may suggest that we have made considerable progress from past inclusion studies in regards to teachers’ comfort and acceptance in teaching students with learning disabilities in the general
education classroom. The participants in this study are providing accommodations and implementing some research-based instructional practices when students with learning disabilities are in their classroom. Despite the progress found in this study, there are still many areas for development in order to improve the education of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. The participating teachers lack of awareness of their instructional needs and barriers when planning instruction for students with disabilities is a concern that emerged from this study. In this next section, the researcher will provide her interpretations of the participants’ responses and conclusions from the study.

*Instruction Planning*

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter II, effective instruction is not a method of teaching, but rather a series of characteristics, which can be embedded into a range of teaching methods (Good, 1994). Effective instruction involves implementing strategies in planning, managing, delivering, and evaluating instruction (Ysseldyke & Salvia, 1995). Inclusion can never be successful with only one method (King-Sears, 1997). The best research can do is inform teachers which strategies have a good chance of working well with students. It is the individual classroom teachers who must determine which strategies to employ with the right students at the right time. “Effective teaching is a dynamic mixture of expertise in a vast array of instructional strategies combined with a profound understanding of the individual students in class and their needs at particular points in time” (Marzano, 2007, p.5). The participants in this study interpreted their instruction planning and strategies as meeting the needs of their students,
but the researcher finds a number of areas of concern and recommendations for future
development in order to improve the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the
general education classroom.

The factor most described by the participants as influencing their instruction
planning was the curriculum. A number of participants described thinking of their
students’ learning styles and abilities when planning instruction, but the participants did
not specifically describe thinking of their special education students when planning
instruction. Most of the participants’ descriptions revealed teachers thinking of the whole
group or the learning styles of most of the class versus individual students when planning
instruction. Although all the participants described using small group instruction in their
classroom to provide individualized instruction to students with learning disabilities,
small group instruction was not a common factor in the teachers’ instruction planning
process. These findings support other studies that have found the practice of whole-class
instruction with little differentiated instruction as the dominant teaching strategy reported
by general education teachers (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997; King-Sears &
Cummings, 1996; Zigmond & Baker, 1990). The participating teachers’ lack of
awareness in their reliance of whole-class instruction with little differentiated instruction
is a concern that emerged from this study.

Classroom assessments provide the necessary information for planning instruction
(Ysseldyke, 2001), but not one participant from this study discussed using assessment
data to plan their instruction. The participants did discuss using small group instruction
with students that they noticed needed extra help, but the participants did not articulate
using student data to plan their small group instruction. When the participants were
asked how students with learning disabilities respond to their instruction, only seven out
the thirteen responses in this area discussed student achievement or outcome data. The
other six participants described how the students with disabilities like or enjoy their
instruction instead of describing student performance outcomes. This lack of using
student achievement data to assess and guide instruction is a concern and area for future
professional development.

Another concern that emerged from the data is the lack of collaboration when
planning instruction for students with learning disabilities. Teachers rarely plan
instruction in collaboration with other teachers and none of the participants in this study
described planning instruction with the special education teacher. Only one participant
expressed an interest in collaborating to plan instruction with the special education
teacher. We know there are significant positive academic outcomes for students with
disabilities in co-taught classes (Bear & Proctor, 1990; Klinger et al., 1998; Margiera &
Zigmond, 2005). If students with learning disabilities are to achieve greater success in
the general education classroom, more growth and development is needed between
special education and general education teachers.

Accommodations

The participants described classroom accommodations as how they respond when
students with learning disabilities are present in their classroom. When discussing
accommodations, none of the participants referred to the accommodations stated in their
student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The participants did not express any
concerns about their ability to provide accommodations or their knowledge in making
modifications for students with learning disabilities. Despite a variety of accommodations evident in the data as a whole, the number of accommodations described by individual participants ranged from only 1 to 5 accommodations. The types of accommodations mentioned by most of the participants indicate a strong reliance on simply modifying lessons and expectations in terms of quantity, duration, and time allotments. Indications of true differentiation for variations in learning style, learning modalities, or other learner differences were noticeably absent from the data from these participants. This absence and reliance on changing quantity of expectations or time allotments indicate that the general education teachers may have a limited repertoire of differentiating strategies and need additional training and professional development to differentiate in ways that better accommodate student learning differences.

**Instructional Strategies**

Previous studies have found that despite the overabundance of effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities, few strategies are systematically and frequently implemented in inclusive classrooms by general education teachers (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993; Malouf & Schiller, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Samuell, 1995; Vergason & Andergg, 1991). This study found general education teachers are implementing a number of research-based instructional strategies in their inclusive classrooms. The effective instructional strategies for inclusion described by the participating teachers included: small group instruction, peer tutoring, and strategy instruction. There is a need to increase and
expand the implementation of these strategies and for these strategies to become a part of the teacher’s thinking when planning instruction for students with learning disabilities.

One of the research-based instructional strategies for inclusion discussed by all the participants was small group instruction. It was evident the participants used small group instruction as the means to provide more individualized instruction to students with learning disabilities. Most of the small group instruction described by the participants was in the area of reading. It was evident the participants were comfortable grouping their students by reading levels and providing small group instruction. When small group instruction was mentioned in the other content areas, it was not a common occurrence. There is a need for further training and development in the area of small group instruction to expand the use of this instructional practice in the general education classroom.

Support

One way to increase the use of small group instruction in the general education classrooms is to increase the amount of staff support in the classroom. The participants perceived additional staff members and volunteers in the general education classroom as providing the most support for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. The extra hands in the classroom allowed the participants to help individual students or provide more small group instruction, but, again, the general education teachers were thinking in terms of supports that allow them to maintain a limited repertoire of differentiation strategies by simply increasing the adult to student ratio in the classroom. Additionally, the participants in this study did not see the special education teachers as a
special source of assistance or guidance in planning for the needs of special education students.

**Barriers**

An interesting finding that emerged from this study is how the participants perceived parents to be their biggest barrier to inclusion rather than emphasizing a lack of support, training, or materials to serve their students’ needs. Again, this finding reveals the participating teachers’ lack of awareness or reflection of their current instructional practices. It is concerning that the participating teachers did not recognize or perceive the following as barriers to inclusion: planning instruction in isolation, lack of collaboration with the special education teacher, the absence of student assessment data when planning instruction, and reliance on whole group instruction with little differentiation. There is a need to increase general education teachers’ awareness of the best practices for teaching students with learning disabilities.

It is possible the participant’s knowledge in knowing the interviewer was a principal led to a “halo effect” where the participants did not state their true feelings in regards to their lesson planning, accepting students with learning disabilities, and instructional strategies. As described in Chapter 3, a number of steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the participants’ responses and validity of the study’s findings. If the participants in this study were attempting to impress the researcher with their responses, it is even more noteworthy to point out the participants’ lack of understanding and knowledge in effective instruction for students with learning disabilities.
Areas for Future Training and Development

This study found the participating teachers have made gains not only in their acceptance of teaching students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom, but also in their willingness and comfort to implement different instructional strategies and accommodations when students with learning disabilities are in their classroom. Although the general education teachers in this study did not interpret needing additional training in order to teach students with learning disabilities, this study found a number of areas where further training and development is recommended in order to continue to improve the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.

King-Sears and Cummings (1996) propose no matter how much general education teachers know about effective instruction, the challenge is to increase teachers’ comfort level so that multiple instructional strategies become everyday occurrences in classrooms. Preparation and support is needed to remediate the discrepancy between what is known about effective teaching and what is done to assist teachers to achieve their full potential for implementing inclusion (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). This study recommends additional training and professional development for general education teachers in the following areas:

1. Co-teaching and other collaboration models for working with the special education teacher to improve services for special education students in the general education classroom.
2. Differentiated instruction to help teachers reflect and think about their students’ readiness level, interests, and learning style when planning instruction.

3. A review on how to use student assessment to guide instruction.

4. Training in how to use small group instruction in all content areas to provide individualized instruction.

5. More support and development in peer tutoring and strategy instruction to increase the use of these practices in the general education classroom.

6. Parent involvement strategies to increase parent participation in education.

7. Integrated training for pre-service teachers through combining the separate disciplines of general education and special education teacher preparation programs into a philosophy that permeates a program and stresses the importance of collaboration, differentiating curriculum, and pedagogy (Titone, 2005).

If the population who participated in this study is a trend, it may suggest that we are at a moment for moving the inclusion movement forward. The participants in this study did not feel unprepared to teach students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom. The participants from this study were open and willing to teach students with learning disabilities, but they lacked an awareness of the need to improve and expand their instructional practices for teaching students with learning disabilities. Additional support and training is needed to further develop the participants’ knowledge and teaching skills in order to improve the education and inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom.
Recommendations for Further Studies

A number of recommendations for future studies emerged from the data. This study was restricted to fifteen elementary general education classroom teachers from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The first recommendation would be to expand this study’s sample size and the geographic area of the participants. Another recommendation would be to study the perspectives of participants not included in this study: middle and high school teachers, specials teachers, and special education teachers. In order to collect more data on the lived experiences of general education teachers, follow-up classroom observations are recommended. Studying the instructional strategies for inclusion as described by the participants using a quantitative approach would also be beneficial.

One of the findings from this study was the lack of collaboration between the general education and special education teachers. Further research is recommended to explore what type of co-teaching and alternative school program models increase the collaboration between general education and special education teachers and better serve students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
REFERENCES


Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 U.S.C & 140 *et seq*.


Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004, Pub. L. No 108-446.


U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Twenty-fourth annual report to congress on the implementation of the individuals with disabilities education act.* Washington, DC.


Appendix A

Consent Form
Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

*Principal Investigator:* Patricia L. Reeves, Ed.D.
*Student Investigator:* Kristen Peterson
*Title of Study:* A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled, “A Qualitative Study of Instructional Strategies Used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms.” In the literature, very little is know about what effective instructional strategies general education teachers use or how teachers plan their instruction when students with disabilities are in their classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the deeper perspectives of general education teachers to understand how they interpret their instruction for students with disabilities. Kristen Peterson is conducting this research project in partial fulfillment of a PhD in Educational Leadership through Western Michigan University.

Participation in this study involves being available for one interview, with the possibility of a follow up interview if clarification is needed. The interview should last about 60-80 minutes and will take place at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will be open-ended with you sharing your instructional experiences. You will also be asked to provide general information about yourself, such as age, level of education, teaching position and classroom demographics. The general outline of the interview is attached for your review. After the interview, you will receive a written copy of the results from your portion of the study to ensure the essence of your instructional experience was captured accurately.

All the information collected from you is confidential. This means that your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. Please be aware that this doctoral dissertation will be published as a public document and may be read by other interested parties. The interview will be audio taped for purposes of transcription. All forms will be coded, and the student investigator will keep a separate master list with the names of the participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participants. If accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to you except as otherwise specified in this consent form. One potential risk of this project is that you may become stressed or upset when sharing your instructional experiences. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty.
You may benefit from this study by being able to voice and share your experiences of teaching students with disabilities in your classroom. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the principal researcher, Dr. Patricia L. Reeves, at (269) 720-3285 or the student researcher, Kristen Peterson, at (906) 439-5339 or kpeterso@gwinn.k12.mi.us. You may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the vice president for research at 269-387-8298 with any concerns that you have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

________________________________________  ___________________
Signature       Date

Consent Obtained by:______________________  ___________________
Researcher’s initials   Date
Appendix B

Study Invitation
Study Invitation

Hello! My name is Kristen Peterson and I am e-mailing to invite you to participate in a research study. I am a special education teacher at Gwinn High School, but I am also a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. This school year, I am conducting research for my dissertation about the instructional strategies used by general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. I am writing to invite you to share your experience as a general education teacher of inclusion in my study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in a 60-80 minute interview session at a time and place of your convenience. During the interview session you will be given an opportunity to share your teaching experiences and will be asked questions about how you plan instruction for students with disabilities in your classroom. Attached is a document of the interview outline for your reference. You may also participate in follow-up conversations, if clarification of your initial interview is necessary.

All information collected from you during the interview is confidential. That means your name and other identifying information will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of the research. In order to make sure, I capture your experience accurately, your interview will be recorded and transcribed into written form. After all the interviews from the study are transcribed, I will look for patterns, themes and trends in the data. Lastly, I will summarize the results from this study in my dissertation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I am asking you to simply rely to this e-mail with the following information:

a) your name and school
b) the grade level that you teach

c) the number of special education students in your classroom

d) your level of education

e) the total number of years that you have been a teacher

After I have heard from you, I will contact you to establish a time to go over information about the study, the consent form, and to conduct the interview. In an appreciation of your time for participation in this research, you have the opportunity to win a digital camera for your classroom.

If you have any questions in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at 906-439-5339 or e-mail me at kpeterso@gwinn.k12.mi.us. Thank you for considering possible participation in this study.

Kristen Peterson
Appendix C

Interview Outline
Interview Outline

1. Describe the makeup of your classroom?

2. Describe how you plan your instruction each week? When do you plan? How much time does it take? Do you write out lesson plans? What are you thinking when you plan your instruction? How do you choose your instructional strategies? How do you feel about lesson planning?

3. Describe what you taught this week and how you taught it. How did the students respond to the lessons? How did the students with disabilities respond?

4. Describe the instructional approaches that you use most often. How do students respond to your instruction? How do the special education students respond to your instruction?

5. How do you know whether or not students are successful? What do you do when they are not?

6. What supports for students with disabilities do you have in your classroom?

7. Can you think of a specific student with a disability that you had and tell me a story about your instructional experiences with the student?
Appendix D

Conceptual Framework
Conceptual Framework

**Historical Evolution of Inclusion**
- Early Court Decisions
- Federal Legislation
- Mainstreaming/Full Inclusion Movements

The practice of inclusion continues to grow in the public schools despite general education teachers’ lack of preparation, training, and support for inclusion.

**Research on Effective Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities**
-- Teacher directed instruction
-- Collaboration
-- Instructional Groupings

Despite an abundant amount of effective instructional strategies in the literature, studies have found teachers minimally change their instruction when students with learning disabilities are in their classrooms.

**General Education Teacher**
Little is known about the deeper perspectives of general education teachers and how they plan and interpret their instruction for students with learning disabilities.
Appendix E

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
Date: December 17, 2007

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
    Kristen Peterson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 07-12-09

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “A Qualitative Study of the Instructional Strategies used by Elementary General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: December 17, 2008