

9-2018

# The Impact of Life Skills Students on General Education Elementary Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education  
Doctorate of Education Program

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The Impact of Life Skills Students on General Education Elementary Teachers' Attitudes  
Toward Inclusive Education

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Instructional Leadership

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2018

## **Abstract**

Numerous general education teachers include students with disabilities in the classroom. The range of academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of students grows with more inclusion occurring classrooms. This qualitative single case study addressed two questions. First, how does the inclusion of life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impact teachers' views on inclusive education? That question also included sub-questions of how do (primary, intermediate, and specialist) teachers describe their attitude toward, and experience with, inclusive education? Secondly, how do elementary teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that includes life skills students in the general education classroom? The researcher intended to provide insight from one school that practices inclusion regularly and to explore its impact on general education teachers' attitude toward inclusion. Through semi-structured interviews, participating teachers tended to have a positive attitude and encouraged the inclusion of life skills students. Even though participating teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusion, there were several supports and resources that teachers needed to create a successful general education classroom. In general, teachers in this study needed more time, training, and qualified assistants. The implications and recommendations for future research based on the findings from this study are discussed.

*Keywords:* Inclusion, teacher attitude, elementary school, students with severe disabilities

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who has supported and encouraged me throughout this process. Thank you to my parents Alan and Sharon Shimamoto, sisters Tammy Turgeau and Jill Shimamoto-Smith, and Aunty Marion Horie. Thank you to all my friends and colleagues who have supported and listened to my successes and frustrations. To Brianna, the most amazing advisor, I could not have completed this process without you! I appreciate all the guidance and support you have given me. I also love sharing our fur-baby stories and pictures with you! Thank you to Dr. Lookabaugh and Dr. Robinson. Your expertise and support throughout this process was phenomenal.

To my fur-babies Hemi, Gibson, Gus, and Ellie, and fur-baby angels, Achilles and Cesar. Thank you for “allowing” me to work. I promise more adventures in the very near future.

To my husband, Tyler Bayer, you have been my rock, shoulder to cry on, someone to bounce ideas off, and part-time editor. This journey is a reflection of our strong partnership. Thank you for being the best husband and fur-baby dad.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Annually, more than 50,000,000 students are enrolled in the United States public school system (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Of those 50,000,000 students, more than 5,000,000 receive educational supports because they have a disability (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). All students, regardless of their ability level, have the right to be educated in the United States (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). This means that students with disabilities have the right to be included with their peers and have access to the same grade level curriculum. “Inclusion in the U. S. education system refers to a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend” (UNESCO, 2008, p. 2). Inclusive education often requires multiple changes to the classroom; many of which inevitably fall into the hands of the classroom teacher. These changes can range from altering the curriculum to changing the physical space in the classroom.

Teachers are often some of the most influential people in a student’s life. They spend numerous hours each year with their students and can influence not only their academic success, but personal success as well. A teacher’s attitude has an impact on student success (Cameron & Cook, 2013; Cook, 2001; Wang, Wang, & Wen, 2015). A teacher’s interaction with individual students was “found to directly and differentially impact students’ educational experiences and opportunities” (Cook, 2001, p. 204). Therefore, it is essential to understand a teacher’s attitude and how that attitude influences their interactions with some of the most vulnerable students in the classroom: students with a disability.

When teachers are faced with numerous stressors, it is vital to understand which of the stressors influences their attitude. One of the stressors is using inclusive practices for students with a disability in the classroom. Inclusive practices can be difficult for teachers if they are not

supported or do not have the knowledge of how to best support all students. This would include an assistant in the classroom or professional development for special education. Research has shown that teachers tend to have an increase in overall positive attitude toward inclusive practices after attending a course or professional development (Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2007; Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). Teachers who have close contact with a person with a disability significantly increased their positive attitude after a professional development course (Forlin & Sin, 2010). However, when it comes to students with severe disabilities, teachers generally tend to have a more negative attitude (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Jones & Hensley, 2012; Wilson, Woolfson, Durkin, & Elliott, 2016). The teachers' attitudes and what causes those attitudes are vital to understand so that teachers can be better supported.

This qualitative intrinsic single site case study focused on an elementary school that had a life skills classroom that served students with severe disabilities and its impact on teacher attitude. A life skills program serves students with intellectual, social, communication, medical, and motor skill needs (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). Life skills students were included as much as possible with grade level peers. However, because of their high mental, emotional, or social needs, it impacted the teacher's physical arrangement of classroom furniture or their curriculum plans. There were two life skills classrooms in the school. One was a primary classroom (kindergarten through third graders) and the other was an intermediate classroom (fourth through sixth graders). The teachers or specialists in this study were grouped into three different sections based on their grade level or job. One group was primary (kindergarten through third grade teachers), another group was intermediate (fourth through sixth grade teachers), and finally there was a group of specialists.

Grouping participants into three sections was based on their different potential experiences with life skills students. The primary group of teachers had the fewest potential experiences with life skills students because the primary life skills program moved to the school in the previous school year. The intermediate group of teachers had the greatest potential experiences with life skills students because the intermediate life skills program started when the school opened 16 years ago. The specialist group had different potential experiences because they do not have a general education class or may not have a classroom where they work with the same group of students daily. These differences account for the groupings; however, they do not provide enough reason to use a comparative approach. There are too few participants to compare to each other, and the purpose of the study was not comparing the groups but rather understanding their experiences of inclusion as one whole group while noting the difference in potential experiences with life skills students.

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers have many responsibilities and duties throughout their work day. Laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensure that students with a disability have the right to receive a quality education (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Inclusive practices have increased across public schools in America because of IDEA. Since students with disabilities attend general education classrooms more often than not, general education teachers have also changed how they practice their craft (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). To meet the needs of all learners, teachers need to use inclusive practices such as curriculum modification or accommodation in their classrooms (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007). Meeting the needs of all learners increases the amount of knowledge and practice that teachers must use daily. While all students have the right to be in a classroom with their peers regardless

of their abilities, when classrooms include a wide range of abilities and needs, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to meet the needs of all students present. It is essential for the success of American education that educational leaders understand what is needed for success in a highly diverse, inclusive education classroom.

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative case study examined how a life skills classroom impacts teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. A qualitative study gave an opportunity for teachers to share their unique perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2013). It is essential in case studies to have a boundary, or the amount of data could theoretically be endless and not qualify as a case study (Merriam, 1998). This study was a single case study because the school and the teachers are within the boundaries of that singular unit (Creswell, 2013). The data was collected through semistructured interviews and the collection of artifacts. Semistructured interviews allowed for the researcher to focus the questioning but still offer the opportunity for participants to share their experiences (Rabionet, 2011). After the data was collected, the researcher used open coding to create categories (Creswell, 2013). Those categories ultimately answered if and how including life skills students impacts teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

### **Research Questions**

There are two main research questions that guided this study:

1. How do the inclusion of life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impact teachers' views on inclusive education?
  - a. How do (primary, intermediate, and specialist) teachers describe their attitude of, and experience with, inclusive education?

2. How do elementary teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that includes life skills students in the general education classroom?

### **Research Objectives**

There were several research objectives for this study. One of the objectives was to understand how life skills students impacted teacher attitude toward inclusive education. Since this was a qualitative study, it also provided details on how their experiences with life skills students have impacted their attitude toward inclusive education. Finally, this study provided insight as to the supports and resources that each participant felt necessary to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that has a life skills classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand if and how life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impacted teacher attitude toward inclusive education. The school in which this study took place has life skills students that were included in some general education classrooms. Generally, teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusive education (Cook, 2001). However, teachers tended to have a more negative attitude toward inclusive education when it involved students with severe disabilities (Alquraini, 2012). Therefore, it was essential to understand if and why this difference was occurring in the school that was being studied. The researcher worked in a school that has a life skills classroom that included students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom. It was essential to study if and how these students impacted teachers' attitudes. Since there were only four out of 26 elementary schools in this district that had a life skills classroom, the results from this study can assist with

informing school principals, as well as other administrators, on the impact of including life skills students in the general education classroom on teacher attitude.

### **Conceptual Framework**

It is essential for researchers to provide the reasoning behind their study, and to justify why their study is essential to similar literature (Maxwell, 2013). The conceptual framework offers insight into the importance of this study and its potential benefits and provides the theory that led to the theoretical framework of the study (Maxwell, 2013). This study's conceptual framework revolved around teacher attitude toward inclusive education regarding students with severe disabilities. The number of students with disabilities enrolled in public schools increased over the past 25 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). With that increase, teachers need to increase their inclusive practices as more students with disabilities are entering the general education classroom. For that reason, there is a need to understand if and how inclusion impacts teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This study also had personal implications because the researcher taught at a school that worked with students with severe disabilities.

Multiple studies regarding inclusive education used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Batsiou, Bebetos, Panteli, & Antoniou, 2008; Campbell, 2010; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Southern, 2010; Wang et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2016; Yan & Sin, 2015). Most studies (Batsiou et al., 2008; Campbell, 2010; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014; Southern, 2010; Wilson et al., 2016; Yan & Sin, 2015) used TPB in a quantitative study. Only a few studies (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Wang et al., 2015) used it in a qualitative study. There was, therefore, an opportunity to take a new view of TPB in a qualitative way. The researcher decided to use a qualitative approach that

provided participants with the opportunity to explain in detail their thoughts and experiences toward inclusive education. A qualitative approach allowed teachers to explain in more detail the reasons behind their beliefs using the TPB framework. This study also focused on the impact of inclusion with students with severe disabilities on teacher attitude. There were a few studies that focused on teacher attitude toward students with severe disabilities. Additionally, there were relatively few studies that focused on students with severe disabilities and their impact on teacher attitude.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms and definitions are used throughout this study.

**General education classroom.** A general education classroom is defined as a classroom in which a general education teacher teaches grade level curriculum to a group of roughly 20–30 students (Cameron & Cook, 2013).

**Inclusive education.** Inclusive education is defined as the situation in which students with a disability are placed in the general education classroom, supported with some type of assistance, and provided meaningful access to grade level curriculum and community (Forlin, Loreman, & Sharma, 2014)

**Life skills classrooms.** These are classrooms for students that have one or more of the following: intellectual, social, communication, medical, and motor skill needs (Oregon Department of Education, 2016).

**Professional development.** This refers to the professional growth opportunities that teachers attend to deepen their understanding of a concept or skill and strengthen their teaching pedagogy (Ko & Boswell, 2013).

**Special education (SPED).** This consists of the “instruction and interventions designed to meet the individual needs of each child with a disability” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1).

**Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).** This consists of three interlinked variables: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that form a behavioral intention that can predict a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Assumptions and limitations are an essential part of any research. Assumptions in research are presumed true for the purposes of the study, while limitations are areas over which the researcher has no control (Wargo, 2015). All participants taught in a school that had a life skills classroom as well as a culture of inclusive educational practices. Therefore, it was assumed that all participants were familiar with, and understood, terminology related to inclusive education. It was also assumed, as participants signed a consent form and that their confidentiality was held with the utmost of importance, that they would provide honest answers to the interview questions.

A limitation to this study was that some participants lacked exposure to and experience with life skills students in their classroom. There have been several changes with the intermediate (fourth through sixth grade) life skills teachers over the past few years. This affected the consistency in which life skills students had access to the general education classroom. The primary (kindergarten through third grade) life skills classroom was transferred to the school less than two years ago. Therefore, primary teachers inherently have had less opportunities to have life skills students in their classroom. Another limitation was the specialists. The majority of the specialists did not have their own classroom, nor did they

interact with large groups of students as general education teachers did. Therefore, their scope of how a student with a disability affected the classroom may be limited.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This research project studied the effects of including life skills students on teacher attitude toward inclusive education. The school chosen was the school where the researcher was employed during the study making it a convenience sample. Participants were chosen from an elementary school that had a life skills classroom which ensured that they (the participants) have had an opportunity to work with students with severe disabilities. There were three subsections of participants: primary (kindergarten through third grade), intermediate (fourth through sixth grade), and specialists. The reason for the subsections of groups was dependent on the life skills classrooms. The intermediate life skills classroom had been at the school since it opened 16 years ago while the primary life skills classroom was transferred less than two years ago. Specialists did not have a regular classroom and were not considered general education teachers. Therefore, they have their own subsection.

There were three other elementary schools within the district that had a life skills program. The reason for using only one school in this case study was that every school had a culture and community unique to itself. Differing school cultures could result in teachers having different attitudes toward inclusion. The focus of this study was about the experiences of the teachers and not differences between schools. Students and parents did not participate in this study even though they could potentially impact teacher attitude. The focus of this study was also on teacher attitude, not student or parent attitude.

## **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was to understand if and how including life skills students impacted teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. Literature regarding inclusive education covered many different facets of this topic. However, there were few studies that focused on inclusion in a qualitative study regarding students with severe disabilities and their impact on teacher attitude (Cook, 2001).

In the district where the researcher worked, students with severe disabilities are placed into special programs designed to address their specific individual needs so they can develop the skills needed to become a productive student and adult. The programs that supported students with severe disabilities required a lower student-to-teacher ratio because of the additional support. However, students with severe disabilities did not necessarily attend their home school because only certain schools within the district are equipped to support them. It was vital to understand how to support students with severe disabilities, as well as the teachers that worked with them so that all staff and students find success in the classroom.

The results from this study provided valuable information about how teaching in a school with a life skills classroom impacted teacher attitude toward inclusive education. It could inform district administrators about specific supports and resources needed by teachers who worked in a school with a life skills program. Because there were few qualitative studies regarding this topic, it can add to the literature about inclusive education. If other school districts are going to use a similar school model (as the school in this study has), it may inform those leaders on how to structure programs and support their teachers. Teachers are one of the most influential people in a school because they spend the most time with the students they serve. It was essential to find

ways to understand the teachers' perspectives and recognize which supports are needed so that all students can be successful in the classroom.

### **Summary and Transition**

As more students with disabilities are integrated into the general education classroom, it is essential to understand how meeting students' diverse needs impacts teachers' attitudes. While most teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusive education, many feel they were not adequately prepared to meet the diverse needs of all students (Ko & Boswell, 2013). Results from this study form another component of inclusive education literature, providing insight to educational leaders and how they plan inclusive education regarding students with severe disabilities. While the results of this qualitative single site case study may not be generalizable, the participants' unique perspectives are a starting point for thorough discussions at other schools.

The remaining portion of the study is as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the known literature about inclusive education and teacher attitude as well as the different methodologies used in previous studies. Chapter 2 also features the history of inclusive education, the theoretical framework of the study, a critique of methodological issues, and a review and synthesis of the literature. Chapter 3 presents a detailed overview of the methods used in this case study, including the process in which data is collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the data that was collected in the study. Finally, Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings and analysis of how well the data answered the research questions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Students with disabilities have a right to, and deserve, the same opportunities in education as their non-disabled classmates (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and no one is more important and impactful than those on the front line: teachers. Children with disabilities are the most marginalized group in the world (Dunlap, 2015). They “remain the most excluded, discriminated not only because of their disability but also because of lack of understanding and knowledge about its causes, implications, and stigma” (Global Partnership for Education, 2017, para. 1). This is evident in educational systems across the world. In 1948, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration recognized that everyone has a right to a free education in their “elementary and fundamental stages” (United Nations, 1948, p. 7). In 2006, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in article 24 it stated that nations “recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination on the basis of equal opportunity” (United Nations, 2017, para. 1). Even though there are no legal ramifications for countries who do not follow these articles, they provide guidance and a standard for educational systems across the globe.

Studies (Cameron & Cook, 2013; Cook, 2001; Wang et al., 2015) show that a teachers’ attitude influences their behavior toward students. Cook (2001) stated that there is a relationship between teachers’ attitudes and the quality of their interactions with students that “directly and differentially impacts students’ educational experiences and opportunities” (p. 204). If educational leaders understand what influences a teacher’s attitude toward students with disabilities, political and educational leaders can provide the right assistance and resources to support teachers. Those positive changes will potentially improve teacher attitude which can lead to more equitable access for students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

This study provided information about inclusive education in one of the largest school districts in Oregon, which serves nearly 20,000 students each year (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). Several specialized programs throughout the district met the needs of all students with a disability. The school district also had social learning centers for students with intensive socio-emotional and behavioral needs; social communication classrooms for students with social communication disorders; a transition service program to support students between the ages of 18 and 21; and life skills classrooms for students that have intellectual, social, communication, medical, and motor skill needs (Oregon Department of Education, 2016).

The focus of this study was to examine the impact of a life skills classroom on teacher attitude toward inclusive education. The first part of the literature review focused on the impact of teacher attitude on student success (Cameron & Cook, 2013; Cook, 2001; Wang et al., 2015) in addition to factors that affected teacher attitude. Those factors included collaboration, personal time, occupational stress, and district support (McGhie-Richmond, Irvine, Loreman, Cizman, & Lupart, 2013). Since teachers play an extremely influential role in students' educational lives, it is vital for educational leaders to understand factors that impede positive attitudes toward inclusive education. There are studies that focus on specific schools (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Guralnick, Neville, Hammond, & Connor, 2007) or regions (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009; Wilde & Avramidis, 2011) because there are differences in the culture and acceptance of students with disabilities. The school culture toward inclusive education may differ from a neighboring school in the same district. Therefore, it was essential to study how including life skills students impacted the attitude of teachers at a given school. While the results are not be generalizable, the experience provided valuable insight about teacher attitude to both administrators at the school and those at district level.

Most education programs include courses on inclusive education, and many districts provide continual professional development about inclusive education for teachers (Forlin & Sin, 2010). The literature review continues with the most impactful education and professional development for teachers. Inclusive education has been supported by laws for decades; however, that does not mean that a synchronous plan of implementation occurs throughout schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Schools that only recently implemented forms of inclusive education may have teachers who lack the knowledge and experience to work with students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, when inexperienced teachers are given adequate and meaningful training or professional development followed by the opportunity to practice and implement new accommodations, they formulate and solidify the importance of inclusive education (Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Jassen, 2012). The literature provides both successful and unsuccessful examples of other forms of training and education that intend to impact teacher attitude toward inclusive education in the general education classroom.

Many schools vary in structure but there is a noticeable difference between elementary and secondary schools. In most elementary schools, teachers teach multiple subjects to one class of students throughout the day while in secondary schools, teachers usually teach one subject to multiple classes of students throughout the day. Studies that focus on the educational level; primary (Cook et al., 2007; Cook, 2001; Glazzard, 2011; Lalvani, 2013; Nusbaum, 2013; Ruijs, Van, & Peetsma, 2010); or secondary (Cambridge-Johnson, Hunter-Johnson, & Newton, 2014; Carter, Asmus, Moss, Biggs, Bolt, Born, & Weir, 2016; Sadioglu, Bilgin, Batu, & Oksal, 2013; Sanagi, 2016), provide information on the differences that occur between the two levels.

There is a profound difference between the experience of elementary and secondary school teachers. Elementary teachers tend to have a more positive attitude toward inclusive

education than secondary teachers (Chiner, & Cardona, 2013; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009). That difference can influence educational leaders' decisions about inclusive practices and professional development support for teachers. Even though this study was conducted only in an elementary school (grades kindergarten through sixth), understanding how including life skills students affected teacher attitude will help administrators with future placement of classrooms both at elementary and secondary schools.

There are several studies (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Jones & Hensley, 2012; Wilson et al., 2016) that focused on the effect that the type of disability has on teacher attitude. Alquraini (2012) found that teachers tend to have a more negative attitude toward students with severe disabilities. When a teacher has a negative attitude it “negatively contributes to the interaction between teachers and students with severe disabilities as well as their learning in the classrooms” (Alquraini, 2012, p. 177). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of including life skills students on teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework provides the reasons why a topic is essential to study, as well as how the study offers information with enough rigor to a community (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The framework for this study encompassed inclusive education. A concern in education is understanding what preparation teachers need to be successful in an increasingly changing classroom where they are asked to do more with less (Lucas & Frazier, 2014). Over the past 25 years, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in public schools has increased from 4,700,000 million to 6,600,000 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Nearly 95% of students with disabilities receive services in general education classrooms. Nearly 62% of those students spend more than 80% of their time in the general education classroom which is

twice of what it was in 1990 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The impact of the increase of students with disabilities in the classroom is still studied because results are not definitive (Cook et al., 2007).

One of the most crucial factors in any student's educational success are teachers (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Teachers can inspire and guide learning and success for students. To do so effectively, it is essential that teachers have a positive attitude toward students with disabilities and the skills and knowledge to employ best practices for engagement and learning (Downing, Eichinger, & Williams, 1997). There are many facets to inclusive education because not all disabilities are the same. "In general, teachers have expressed positive feelings toward the general concept of inclusion but have been less optimistic about the degree to which they are adequately prepared to successfully implement inclusion" (Cook et al., 2007, p. 230). With the increasing needs of teachers, understanding what affects their attitude toward inclusive education can assist administrators with future planning and allotment of resources for a school district.

There is a wide range of disabilities for which American schools provide resources and support that include specific learning disabilities such as language, listening, mathematical calculations, autism, emotional disturbances, and other chronic or acute health problems (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). A school district located in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon provides resources and support by promoting inclusive practices throughout its schools. However, with such a wide range of needs, many students with severe disabilities are provided services at particular schools where they still have access to general education classrooms. These schools have specialized programs that provide students with specialized support.

As a classroom teacher, the researcher's work is impacted by inclusive practices. In the school where I teach this is called a life skills program, which provides support for students with severe developmental disabilities. Furthermore, there are only four out of 26 elementary schools in the district that have a life skills program. Students in this program are transported out of their home elementary school to one of the four life skills schools. It is essential to study the effects of a life skills program on the attitudes of teachers. Even though the study focused on only one particular school, it will provide valuable insight for this particular school community and for the district on how to best support teachers and students alike.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) to frame this study assisted with understanding and even predicting a teacher's behavior toward inclusive education. By understanding the impact of a life skills program on the three variables of TPB, this study could assist future decisions about transporting students from their home school and improve teacher attitude toward inclusive education. This, in turn, can impact their interactions with students with disabilities.

#### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) formulates that there are three interlinked variables: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that form a behavioral intention that can predict a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals who have a positive attitude and subjective norm, with confidence in their perceived control will more likely perform a certain behavior. Studying teachers' attitudes using the TPB has assisted in understanding what factors contribute to teachers' attitudes toward certain ideas, curricula, or policies (Ajzen, 1991).

TPB was developed as an extension of the theory of reasoned action where the central factor in both theories is the intention to perform a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) formulated that the “stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance” (p. 181). One of the variables that influence behavioral intention is perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control “refers to people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest” (Ajzen, 1991).

The idea of perceived behavioral control is similar to other ideas such as Bandura’s (1977 as cited in Ajzen, 1991) concept of self-efficacy and Atkinson’s (1964 as cited in Ajzen, 1991) theory of achievement motivation (Ajzen, 1991). Another variable that Ajzen (1991) stated is the attitude toward that particular behavior that “refers to the degree to which a person has favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (p. 188). How a person feels about a particular behavior influences their intention to do that behavior. Finally, the subjective norm “refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior” (p. 188). Depending on the cultural norm of a school, certain behaviors impact whether a person will intend to do a certain behavior. The norm surrounding a particular behavior “reflects the extent to which the ‘important others’ would approve or disapprove of the behavior” (Batsiou et al., 2008, p. 203). For example, if the school culture norm is to homogeneously group students by ability, a teacher who wants to heterogeneously group students by ability may have a more difficult time doing so because that behavior is against the cultural norm of the school. Figure 1 provides an illustration of Ajzen’s (1991) TPB. The three variables (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavior control) together influence a person’s intention toward a behavior, impacting the outcome of whether or not the behavior is performed.

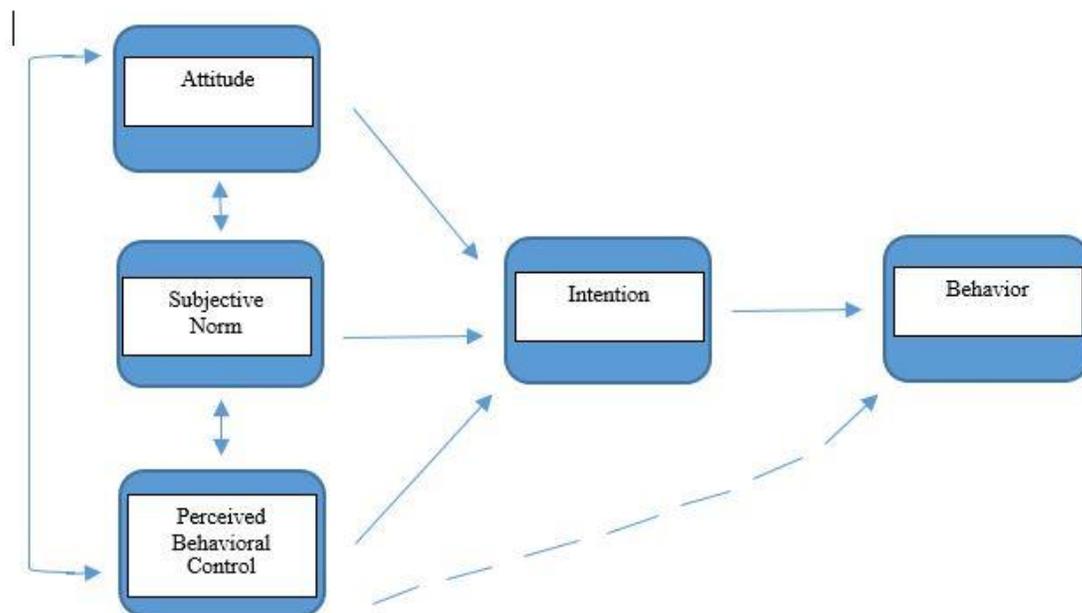


Figure 1. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior.

Many studies (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Berry, 2010; Cook, 2002; Forlin et al., 2014; Forlin et al., 2007; Forlin & Sin, 2010; Gökdere, 2012; Kraska & Boyler, 2014; Lucas & Frazier, 2014; Male, 2011; Swain et al., 2012; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014) have focused on the impact of educating teachers about inclusive education. Forlin et al. (2014) studied the effects of an educational course on teachers' attitudes using the TPB. Since the late 2000s providing teachers with professional development regarding inclusive education has increased positive attitude and intention to use inclusive practices. (Forlin & Sin, 2010). Furthermore, professional development classes were found to have the strongest amount of change in questions pertaining to perceived behavior control (Forlin et al., 2014). Ahmed and Desai (2007) had similar conclusions, which showed perceived behavioral control and attitude toward the behavior had the most impact on their intended behavior toward inclusive education. TPB has been successful in relating three particular factors to predict a behavior and is "one of the most influential

theories in investigations of the relationship between cognitions and behavior” (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 463).

The study of the effect of a life skills program on teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education using TPB is essential for the district in which I work. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2012) stated that “there is a gap in the literature with respect to the application of TPB to teacher attitudes and behavior toward children with special needs in inclusive settings” (p. 47). There are also a few studies (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; Ferreira, Aguiar, Correia, Fialho, & Pimentel, 2017; Southern, 2010) that specifically focused on students with severe disabilities. This study will not only provide much needed information for the district in which I work but also other districts that have interest in creating a similar program and school structure, such as the life skills program, in their schools. Figure 2 provides an illustration of the conceptual framework of this study. The conceptual framework follows the same format of Ajzen’s (1991) TPB but added the effect of including life skills students on all three variables.

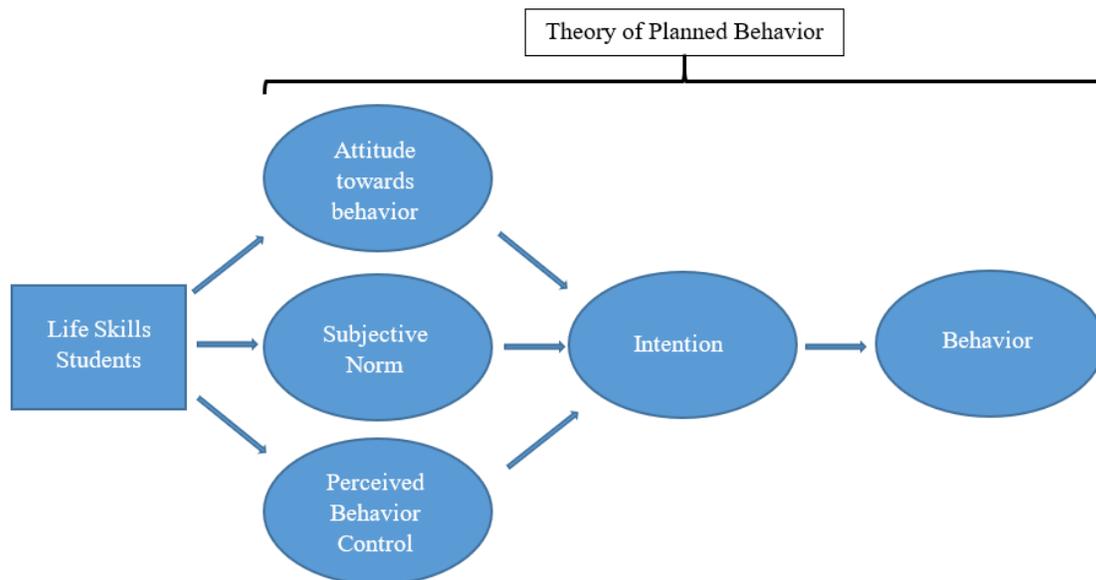


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of this study.

## **Review of Research Literature**

All students deserve to be treated equitably in schools regardless of their educational needs; thus, many countries have laws to protect and promote inclusive educational practices. Schools that practice inclusive education “ensure that all students are welcomed, valued, and learn together in regular education classrooms, regardless of their particular learning characteristics and needs” (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, p. 197). Therefore, “the traditional isolated way in which many schools have functioned is anachronistic in a time of changing family demographics, an increasingly demanding workplace, and growing student diversity” (Sanders, 2006, p. 2). When “a school-wide emphasis on positive discipline, proper training, adequate funding, support in the classroom, and strong communication” (Adams, n.d., para. 7) exists, inclusive education can be successful. However, this increase in diversity can also increase the challenges in the classroom. Teachers work with these challenges daily and play an influential role in the classroom. Since teachers are the primary figure in the successful implementation of inclusive education (Ahmmed, 2013; Forlin & Sin 2010), understanding how their attitude impacts their classroom is important for student success.

### **The Legal History of Inclusive Education**

For decades, U. S. law has actively supported students with disabilities and ensured that they have access to education (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Before the 1970s, only one out of every five children with a disability was educated in public schools, and many were excluded from schools because of certain state laws (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). In 1975, the federal government enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC) Act. The EAHC Act provided students with a free public education. There were four purposes of the EAHC act:

- all children with disabilities have the right to a free public education that is designed to meet their individual needs
- that both children's and parents' rights are protected
- to assist states and local districts with resources
- to assess the effectiveness of specialized educational programs (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

Over several decades, EAHC made several amendments and in 1990 was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that provided more supports and rights to children and parents (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Parents were encouraged to become more involved with their child's individualized education plan (IEP), which provided opportunities to help craft their child's education plan with the school (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Each amendment created increased access, evaluations, and rights for students and parents. These amendments have given children with disabilities the right to a higher quality early intervention programs, access to their neighborhood schools, and more access to the general education classroom, resulting in higher graduation rates and employment (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was enacted in 2001 and focused on closing the achievement gap of students that lived in low-income areas (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Together with IDEA, NCLB claimed that it would increase the accountability of educators, raise the academic achievement of all students, and close the achievement gap between historically lower achieving groups and their higher performing peers (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). However, NCLB had several flaws. If a school did not meet the national standard for several years in a row, students could transfer to other schools or the school had to

provide free tutoring services (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The problem with those ideas was that most students did not take the offer of transferring and there was no consistent process to hire tutors (Klein, 2015). In 2015, lawmakers restructured NCLB into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), relinquishing some of the authority of the U. S. Secretary of Education. ESSA also gave state and local school districts more flexibility while still maintaining high levels of accountability, all the while still focusing on improving the academic success of students with disabilities and other low-performing groups of students (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Through ESSA, state leaders could now create their own school ratings and teacher evaluations. With the change from NCLB, state leaders do not have to fear federal funding being pulled because of low test scores (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).

### **Teachers' Attitudes Impact on Students**

A teacher's attitude influences their behavior toward students (Cook, 2001; Wang et al., 2015; Cameron & Cook, 2013). If teachers are the central figure in successful inclusive education, knowing what factors impact their attitude is essential to make any changes in support. McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013) concluded that there are several factors that teachers need to positively impact their attitude, and thus have success in an inclusive classroom: collaboration, personal time, lowered occupational stress, and district support.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration includes not only other educators but also parents and the students themselves (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Because no two students are alike or have the same disability, "collaboration among teachers, support professionals, administrators, and parents figures prominently in the research and pedagogical literature and is inarguably an essential feature of inclusive schools, ultimately benefitting student and teachers' professional

development” (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, p. 200). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) claim that little is known about what teachers need to know to find success in an inclusive classroom. An issue that impedes researchers in understanding what teachers need to know to implement successful inclusive practices is the broad use of the term “inclusive” in education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive practice across schools can “take many forms and little is known about the detail of practice at the classroom level” (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 814). Furthermore, the difficulty of meeting the needs of each unique student in each classroom is exacerbated by district policies and rules. For example, Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) stated “a school’s policy on setting may make it difficult for a teacher to use alternative grouping strategies in some lessons” (p. 819) and the “determinist beliefs that pervade education policy make it difficult for teachers to take alternative decisions and actions that reject such beliefs” (p. 820). The level of support teachers receive directly impacts their behavior toward their students.

Collaboration with other teachers, parents, and administrators is vital when a student’s behavior becomes a safety issue. Students with severe behavioral issues are not “bad” students, but their behavior could be linked to their disability (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2017). When supporting those unwanted behaviors, collaboration and teamwork is essential. Glazzard (2011) found similar concerns regarding collaboration. Participants stated that inclusion is effective when there is support, especially support for behavioral issues in the classroom (Glazzard, 2011). Glazzard (2011) discussed the importance of support in the classroom. When collaboration is high among teachers, parents, and administrators, it leads to more positive views from teachers of inclusive education (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013).

**Personal time.** Another factor that influences a teacher's attitude is the allowance of personal time during and after a school day. Personal time allows teachers to take the much-needed time to rejuvenate and revitalize themselves for the next day (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). Teachers are known for working numerous hours outside of the classroom, and for "looking after other people's needs, fixing situations that should never have occurred and chasing around after other people" (Westwood, 2008, p. 31). Westwood (2008) also noted, "[the teachers'] needs are certainly not other people's priority" (p. 31). Similarly, some teachers noted concerns about the additional workload that inclusive practices bring (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). These inclusive practices include adaptations and accommodations that not all teachers provide but is essential for "students with disabilities to succeed in inclusive environments" (Cook et al., 2007, p. 230). The additional workload affects their time outside of the classroom. Teachers need to have personal time to reset their minds and bodies for another day filled with meeting their students' needs.

**Occupational stress.** Furthermore, teachers experience a roller-coaster of emotions throughout the day such as "high-intensity emotions like anger, frustration, excitement, and elation are physiologically taxing" (Murph, 2017, para. 9). Many teachers have concerns about inclusive education, and adding medical, communicative, or severe behavioral or intellectual needs increases the level of anxiety. Alquraini (2012) specifically focused on students with a severe intellectual disability and found that teachers tend to have a negative attitude toward students with a severe intellectual disability. A reason for the negative attitude may be a lack of education, or experience with students with disabilities, especially in areas where the use of inclusive classrooms is still in its infancy.

**District support.** Strong district support improves teacher attitude toward inclusive education (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). Successful implementation of any program begins with the leadership. Therefore, an effective leader needs to be able to inspire others to function at their peak and problem solve together to better the organization (Hallowell, 2001). “Teachers expect the district to support an environment of inclusion and provide the resources in order for inclusion to be possible” (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, p. 219). One teacher stated that for inclusive education to work, all stakeholders must be willing participants and all decisions must be carefully weighed and considered. Furthermore, “policy makers must have the funds in place for adequate training of teachers, facilities, and resources for students” (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014, p. 14). District leaders need to lead by example and provide the necessary supports to elevate teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

A teacher’s attitude has a significant impact on student success. District leaders can help improve teacher attitude by providing supports for teachers (Downing et al., 1997). Many teachers seek highly trained and qualified classroom assistants, positions that districts have control over (Downing et al., 1997). Other supports that district leaders can provide are more time for collaboration as well as opportunities for more professional development and education (Downing et al., 1997). To have successful inclusive education, district leaders must support their teachers.

### **Teacher Perception of Support**

Just as no two students are identical, the way teachers perceive a support can differ. When teachers perceive that they have more support, their attitude toward inclusive education tends to be more positive (Ahmed, 2013). Humans innately want to connect with one another (Hallowell, 2011), which supports the idea that the more perceived support a teacher has, the

better the attitude they will have toward inclusive education. Ko and Boswell (2013) concluded that some teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusive education, but felt that they were not adequately trained or supported to make them feel that they are capable of success. “Challenges related to inclusion that participating teachers emphasized related, in large part, to insufficient preservice learning, as well as their need for professional development learning opportunities” (Ko & Boswell, 2013, p. 237). Teachers need to feel confident with their skills and knowledge about inclusive education, and that is attained through professional learning opportunities (Ko & Boswell, 2013).

The support and resources that teachers have has an impact on their attitude, which contributes to their behavior toward inclusive education. Downing et al. (1997) found that teachers wanted not only more professional development but also well trained special educators and aides. Simply having any person as an aide in the classroom is not enough (Downing et al., 1997). An aide who is unskilled or not trained to work with students with disabilities will not support either the student with the disability or the classroom teacher properly. An inclusive classroom increases the range of academic and behavioral needs in the classroom. Nearly half of the participants stated concerns about not meeting the needs of all students, and “some IEP objectives could not be achieved and that the child would not learn” (p. 137). Having a highly trained aide can help students with disabilities without completely relying on the classroom teacher (Downing et al., 1997).

### **How Training About Inclusive Education Impacts Teacher Attitude**

Educating teachers on how to teach in an inclusive environment is vital for their future students’ success. All teachers have undergone general courses in education, but then will pursue specific coursework to prepare them for their chosen field in education. For instance,

English language development specialists gain a deeper understanding of the needs of second language learners in schools. Similarly, special education teachers take specific course work to deepen their understanding of issues that are required of special education services. With the increase in inclusive practices, more teachers need training in understanding and meeting the needs of students with disabilities. There are several studies (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Forlin et al., 2007; Lucas & Frazier, 2014; Swain et al., 2012; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014) that focused on how a course on inclusive education affects a teacher's attitude. Varcoe and Boyle (2014) and Forlin et al. (2007) discovered that by taking a single course about inclusion, teachers often have a more positive attitude toward full inclusion. Those who could also define inclusive education had a greater increase of positive attitude toward inclusive education (Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). Meeting the needs of such a vast range of intelligences and behaviors is a daunting task. Teachers had a more meaningful understanding of the importance of inclusive education, and how to implement and accommodate students when given the opportunity to put theory into practice through fieldwork (Swain et al., 2012).

However, there are studies where teachers' attitudes did not increase after a class on inclusive education. Lucas and Frazier (2014) found that engaging in coursework on diversity did not have a significant impact on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The course "did not impact the perceived ability to teach students with disabilities . . . teachers who understand and believe in integration are more likely to practice inclusive behaviors" (Lucas & Frazier, 2014, p. 214). The amount of knowledge and information teachers need to understand and implement inclusive education would be difficult to teach in such a short time frame. Beacham and Rouse (2012) also found no significant increase in positive attitude toward inclusive education even after a course on inclusive education, only a slight change in strength of

views. A reason for the lack of significant increase is that inclusive education was infused into the core teaching program. Therefore, similar to Lucas and Frazier's (2014) findings, the course helped "sustain the pro-inclusion attitudes and beliefs that are apparent at the start of the course" (Beacham & Rouse, 2012, p. 8). The beliefs and views of teachers about inclusive education plays a role in their post-course work attitude.

### **Teacher Attitude**

Teacher attitude has an impact on student learning, especially in inclusive environments (Monsen et al., 2014). Monsen et al., (2014) stated, "teachers with more positive attitudes toward inclusion [had] classroom environments with greater levels of satisfaction and cohesiveness and lower levels of friction, competitiveness, and difficulty than for those with teachers who held less positive attitudes" (p. 115). There are several studies (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009; Todorovic, Stojilkovic, Djigic, & Ristanic, 2012) that focused on the differences between the attitudes of elementary and secondary teachers. Some differences between elementary and secondary teaching is the daily structure. Elementary teachers tend to spend the majority of their day with one class of students while secondary teachers cycle through several classes of students each day. Furthermore, elementary teachers teach multiple subjects while secondary teachers tend to teach one subject multiple times throughout the day. The differences in structure may be related to the difference in positive attitude toward inclusive education (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). Chiner and Cardona (2013) believed that elementary teachers receive more education and training than secondary teachers, along with less pressure to achieve certain subject goals, this being the reason for the difference in positive attitude toward inclusive education. Secondary teachers tend to be "well trained in specific subjects, but lack specific knowledge to teach and, especially, address

students' SEN (special educational needs)" (Chiner & Cardona, 2013, p. 538). The difference in school structure between elementary and secondary may have an impact on the difference in attitude.

**Elementary teachers' attitude.** Elementary teachers have an important job of building the foundation of students' educational careers. Several studies have found that elementary teachers tend to have a more positive attitude toward inclusive education than secondary teachers (Chiner, & Cardona, 2013; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009). Elementary teachers tend to have one class of students compared to secondary teachers who cycle through several classes of students a day. That provides elementary teachers more time with one group of students compared to secondary teachers who teach several groups of students for a limited amount of time each day. When teachers have more time with individual students, they have more time to build relationships with them. McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013) stated that another difference is that elementary teachers "believed that inclusion included the celebration of strengths, as well as meeting individual needs, while secondary teachers discussed inclusion primarily in terms of meeting individual needs" (p. 212). Additionally, elementary teachers tended to focus on the whole child while secondary teachers focused more on the academic success of students (McGhie-Richmond).

**Secondary teachers' attitude.** The difference between the structure of an elementary and secondary school is believed to be a cause in the difference in positive attitude toward inclusive education (Todorovic et al., 2012). Elementary schools are "created to be suitable for everyone" (p. 74) while secondary schools tend to have a different expectation because students are tested and accepted into secondary school. The difference in attitude is apparent through interviews. One elementary teacher that McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013) interviewed explained

that inclusive education is the new normal that embraces diversity. “We have lots of children within our school with lots of different ability levels and strengths and weaknesses” (p. 212), yet a secondary teacher expressed inclusive education as something that “can only happen to a point . . . [and] the class does not change. It is finding ways to adapt [the students] to the class so that everybody can maintain a certain level” (McGhie-Richmond, 2013, p. 212). Even with the structural differences between elementary and secondary schools, all teachers need to have a positive attitude toward inclusive education to best meet the needs of all students.

### **Impact of Inclusion on Non-Disabled Students**

Inclusive education creates a wider range of abilities in a classroom. A concern that many have with inclusive education is the impact of including students with disabilities on non-disabled students (Ruijs et al., 2010). “Despite growing awareness and increased interaction, peer acceptance is often lacking” (de Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, & Post, 2012, p. 572). Some studies (de Boer et al., 2012; Gannon & McGilloway, 2009; Swaim & Morgan, 2001) found that the type of disability affected the acceptance from a non-disabled peer. Gannon and McGilloway (2009) focused on the acceptance from elementary non-disabled students toward students with Down Syndrome. “Overall attitudes toward inclusion were consistently and statistically significantly more negative than those toward sociability” (p. 455). However, some studies have proved this unfounded (Dessemonete & Bless, 2013; Ruijs et al., 2010). Ruijs et al. (2010) concluded after studying close to 30,000 non-disabled students that there was no negative relationship between “inclusive education and the academic achievement of typical students” (p. 385). Dessemonete and Bless (2013) also concluded that there is no negative academic impact on typical students when students with disabilities are in the classroom but positive attitudes toward a person with a disability tends to increase.

In one particular secondary school setting, general education students were paired with a student with a severe disability (Carter et al., 2016). After one semester, many typical students were open to resuming their role as a peer mentor and stayed in contact with their peer partner after a summer and semester passed (Carter et al., 2016). Academics is an important focus for all students in school but showing kindness and acceptance of students who are different is just as important.

### **Severely Disabled Students**

Students with severe disabilities have the same rights as non-disabled students to be in the general education classroom. However, some schools place these students in self-contained classrooms for various reasons (Oregon Department of Education, 2015). Students with severe disabilities require more attention, support, and/or modification than students with mild disabilities (Southern, 2010). Students with severe disabilities are a subset of students that some teachers have a different attitude toward (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001). Teachers tend to have a more negative attitude toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities because they require more support and resources. Alquraini (2012) stated that teachers “tended to be less accepting of working with students with severe intellectual disabilities in their general classroom” (p. 177). Alquraini (2012) also found that there was no improvement in attitude toward students with severe disabilities after a professional development course.

Cook (2001) showed a relationship between teachers’ attitude toward students and the quality of the teacher-student interaction. Based on this idea, Cook (2001) concluded that there were four types of teachers’ attitude that directly impact a student’s school experience: attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. Cook (2001) found that the more severe or obvious the disability, the more a significant feeling of indifference occurred. Indifference in

this study meant that the teacher was most unprepared to discuss that child with their parent if they dropped by for a conference. The mild or hidden type of disability had a significantly higher rate of rejection by teachers (Cook, 2001). Rejection in this study equated to the teacher feeling relief to remove one student from the classroom (Cook, 2001). “Students with the most intensive and discrepant needs are less often rejected by teachers than students whose learning characteristics more closely approximate those of modal, nondisabled students” (p. 209). Cook (2001) added that the behavior of those students with obvious disabilities tended to be dismissed. This means that the quality of education that a student receives might depend on the type of disability they have. Some students may be at a disadvantage not just because of the limits of their disabilities but their teacher’s attitude toward those disabilities.

Students with severe disabilities may not be able to clearly communicate how they feel to accurately measure the academic or social growth of inclusive education. Southern (2010) found that secondary teachers share this sentiment. Students with multiple severe needs often add to the pressures of a general educator’s responsibilities. There seems to be a general trend that teachers’ attitudes improve after a course on inclusive education (Southern, 2010). Since students with severe disabilities have more needs than other students, more training and education is needed for teachers to improve their attitude toward students with severe disabilities.

There are many factors that work together to create a successful inclusive classroom. The varying degrees of the abilities of students, support, and teacher knowledge about inclusive education all impact how students with disabilities are treated in the general education classroom. When teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusive education, it creates a positive relationship toward students with disabilities and positively affects their learning (Cook, 2001). All students have the right to an education and deserve to have equitable treatment from

their teachers. It is imperative to understand the numerous factors to support teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, so all students have success in school.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

A critical examination of methodologies is essential in the research process. "Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (Creswell, 2013, p. 15). Critically analyzing methodologies used in prior research and literature can assist with determining the right method for a study. For the topic of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, both quantitative and qualitative methods were prevalent. There were a variety of methods used such as ethnographic research, grounded theory, descriptive and correlational research.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative methodologies are used when researchers "want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participant in a study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Qualitative data is essential if the goal is to discover unknown ideas or themes, explore life experience or develop an understanding of perception (Creswell, 2013). Investigating how and why teachers feel or believe in a particular manner cannot necessarily be quantified statistically. Therefore, qualitative data provides those answers. When participants have a voice, they can give accurate answers that cannot be answered through numerical data. Horne and Timmons (2009) used qualitative data collection to allow teachers to share their experience with inclusion and increase collaboration and support. There are several different types of qualitative data. Within the literature, several studies (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Cameron & Cook, 2013; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Glazzard, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Ko & Boswell, 2013) used an

ethnographic or grounded Theory approach in an effort to discover themes that surround teacher attitude toward inclusive education. These two types of approaches are used frequently to discover themes in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013).

### **Ethnography Research**

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) used an ethnographic inquiry in an effort to explain how and why teachers used certain inclusive practices in their classrooms. An ethnographer “describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2013, p. 90). One study employed a two-part study that had six months of observations of the classroom teacher followed by an interview that clarified and had that teacher reflect on certain observable actions (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the culture to understand and clarify any actions and communication between the observed groups (Creswell, 2013). Informal conversations and observations are very much a part of ethnographic research, and it is these informal conversations that were used to “clarify any immediate questions about the observations; to encourage the practitioners to begin to think about their inclusive pedagogy; and to help build rapport in preparation for the extended interviews” (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 816). Using an ethnographic qualitative research, researchers can interview participants, providing an opportunity to question at length, which also allows the conversation to lead to other ideas or questions that would not necessarily be in a quantitative survey.

### **Grounded Theory**

Researchers use grounded theory to discover a theory, usually through coding (Creswell, 2013). Many studies (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Cameron & Cook, 2013; Glazzard, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Ko & Boswell, 2013) regarding understanding teachers’ perspectives

and attitudes toward inclusive education used coding to establish certain phenomena or themes. Coding words or terms throughout an interview or observation will lead to certain themes or ideas in a grounded theory qualitative study without using numbers. Coding helps “the researcher make connections in the conditions influencing [a particular] phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). Cameron and Cook (2013) focused on the differences in goals that teachers created for included students and discovered four themes through transcribing and coding each interview. “Teachers’ responses were separated into their smallest meaningful units and a process of constant comparison was employed to develop a series of themes” (Cameron & Cook, 2013, p. 81). However, Ko and Boswell (2013) focused on P.E. teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education and discovered four themes by analyzing and coding the “words, phrases, expressions, or statements that were mentioned most often and reflected the interest of research questions” (p. 229). Coding provides researchers a way to compare and generalize a variety of verbal answers to unveil certain themes through their study.

### **Limitations of Qualitative Research**

Unlike quantitative studies, in which participants have to provide an answer on some type of numerical scale to be statistically analyzed, qualitative research gives participants the power to answer freely, as well as provide their own ideas and thoughts, which gives them more voice in a study (Creswell, 2013). However, there are drawbacks to using qualitative methods (Creswell, 2013). Collecting and analyzing qualitative data can be time-consuming (Adams, 2015). Some qualitative studies regarding inclusive education (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Cameron & Cook, 2001; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010) included observations before interviewing the participant. First, Cameron and Cook (2001) observed participants in each of their classrooms, created semistructured questions based on their observations, then interviewed each for nearly an hour.

Casebolt and Hodge (2010) used multiple steps to analyze their interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by one researcher while another “listened to the audiotaped interviews while reading along with the written transcripts to check for accuracy [and] minor edits were made as needed” (p. 145). Finally, an independent research team examined the accuracy of the transcripts (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010). Ensuring accuracy and the quality of observations and interviews can take an immense amount of time.

External validity is a study’s power to generalize its findings (Adams, 2015). “The more diverse the sample the greater the likelihood that the results will generalize beyond the particular people and setting of [the] study” (p. 73). Many qualitative studies used fewer than 20 participants, which limits external validity and the capability to generalize the findings. However, depending on the purpose of the study, generalizing the findings may not be critical (Creswell, 2013). A study that only affects a small, specific group still matters to that specific group and does not diminish its effects (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Therefore, even though a small sample size is not generalizable, it can provide valuable insight about a particular experience.

## **Quantitative Methods**

Quantitative methods require using numbers to measure each participant’s data (Adams, 2015). People “rely on quantitative measure because of the ease of understanding and analyzing numerical data” (Adams, 2015, p. 79). Many studies (Ahmmed, 2013; Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Lucas & Frazier, 2014; Ross-Hill, 2009; Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011; Todorovic et al., 2012) regarding inclusive education use quantitative data to potentially reach hundreds of participants. “The larger the sample size relative to the population size and heterogeneity, the better external validity the study has because it improves your chances that your results will

generalize to other samples” (Adams, 2015, p. 133). The results of the deliberate and careful planning of a large sample of participants have the potential to generalize (Adams, 2015).

Ahmed (2013) used a quantitative correlational design to ensure that the results would have external validity and could be generalized for the entire surveyed area. Researchers use correlational design to study the relationship between two or more variables (Adams, 2015). The focus of the study was the attitude of primary teachers toward inclusive education, as well as the effect of a principal on a teacher’s attitude. Over 1,300 teachers were given a survey and over 700 correctly completed and returned their answers (Ahmed, 2013). A process of four-stage sampling ensured that a large random sampling was represented by the general population in that area. By using a quantitative survey, researchers could quantify a large set of data and generalize their results. Additionally, using a correlational design, Ahmed (2013) found significant correlations between several variables that led to a conclusion that “a policy of inclusive education that outlines and clearly defines what needs to take place at the school-building level is also required. Such a policy would provide uniform expectations for school principals and teachers” (Ahmed, 2013, p. 111). Using a large sample size that can generalize a population can provide strong evidence for educational leaders to make policy changes because the changes have the potential to affect all educators involved.

### **Limitations of Quantitative Research**

People may “mistakenly believe that numerical data is ‘better’ or more valid than narrative information because numbers have an agreed-upon meaning” (Adams, 2015, p. 77). Using qualitative data can require researchers to interpret certain numerical measurements (Adams, 2015). Several studies (Ahmed, 2013; Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Lucas & Frazier, 2014; Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Todorovic et

al., 2012) used a Likert-type scale to quantitatively measure their data. The Likert-type scale provides an equal interval scale for researchers to numerically analyze the non-numerical data (Adams, 2015). Lucas and Frazier (2014) used a Likert-type scale to measure the effectiveness of a 3-hour course about diversity on the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusive education. Lucas and Frazier (2014) quantified more than 100 pre-service teachers' attitudes that led to results that showed the 3-semester-hour course had a minimal effect. Lucas and Frazier (2014) used the Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) Scale that other studies (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2002) implemented. However, using quantitative instrumentation such as the ORI does not allow participants to offer alternative answers other than what is provided on the scale.

Quantitative methods also have limitations in research. Quantitative measures typically use a closed-ended response, such as a Likert-type scale that limits the response of each participant (Adams, 2015). Another limitation is the unknown amount of responses a researcher will receive. Researchers can potentially send surveys to thousands of participants. However, they do not have control over how many participate. Saloviita and Schaffus (2016) had that particular issue of minimal participation. Researchers sent over 2,000 surveys and had less than 25 percent respond to the survey (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). It is difficult to generalize their findings to the entire population as less than a quarter of the population responded.

### **Summary of Methodological Review**

It is critical for researchers to choose the proper method to conduct their research. Inclusive education is essential because it provides educational opportunities for all students. Researchers in this field must know what questions they want answered to choose the right method. Researchers must know how much external validity is wanted, and how much “voice”

participants will have before conducting their studies. That will assist in determining what type of research method to employ. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have a place in inclusive education research to answer the plethora of questions needed to best support teachers, parents, and students.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

There is a lack of consistent successful inclusive practices in American school districts (Ross-Hill, 2009). Because each school has a unique culture based on the attitudes and understandings of inclusive education, successful implementation of inclusive education in one school does not necessarily translate to success in all schools (Wilde & Avramidis, 2011). That is why there is a continual need to study and improve teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

There were several themes that appeared throughout the literature: positive teacher attitude toward inclusive education (Ahmed & Desai, 2007; Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Campbell, 2010; Forlin et al., 2014; Gökdere, 2012; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016), the importance of professional development specific to inclusive practices (Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Male, 2011; Swain et al., 2012; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014), and the differences in teacher attitude depending on the severity of the disability (Alquraini, 2012; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Cook, 2001; Ferreria et al., 2017). These themes will guide researchers to pinpoint further topics to research to understand how to improve teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

#### **Positive Teacher Attitude**

Many studies about inclusive education show that teachers tend to have a positive attitude toward inclusive practices (Ahmed & Desai, 2007; Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Campbell, 2010; Forlin et al., 2014; Gökdere, 2012; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). However, there were a few studies (Alquraini, 2012; Sadioglu et al., 2013; Townsend, 2009) that concluded teachers

tended to have a negative attitude toward inclusive practices. One of the reasons why these studies had a different outcome is based on the culture of the area in which the studies took place. Townsend's (2009) study discovered that teachers tended to have a negative attitude. However, Townsend (2009) stated that the study occurred in a rural area that is isolated. Many teachers in this rural area were not qualified, had minimal professional development, and the schools lacked sufficient funding (Townsend, 2009). Even though the outcome was different than most studies, the results are no less important to that small rural community to show what supports are needed to increase teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

My study on the effects of including life skills students on teachers' attitude toward inclusive education involves a singular school. Similar to the Townsend (1997) study, the culture of my school may differ from other neighboring school communities. However, my study's results will be important to this school's community, just as Townsend's (1997) results were to that rural area.

### **Professional Development**

Teachers are a vital part of education and must continually strive to learn new ideas and strategies to increase student knowledge through professional development. "Only education is capable of saving our societies from possible collapse" (Piaget as stated in Robinson, 2010, p. 47). Many studies (Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Male, 2011; Swain et al., 2012; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014) concluded that teachers tended to improve their positive attitude toward inclusive education after a course or class about inclusive practices. Male (2011) found that high-quality professional development can raise the attitudes of teachers and should become a priority for administrators and educational leaders. Male (2011) noted a problem that "far fewer teachers appear to be accessing continuing professional development opportunities relevant to the

education of children and young people with special educational needs” (p. 185). Teachers need to keep abreast of skills and strategies to successfully implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. Professional development has shown to improve teacher attitude, which has a positive effect on student learning (Kraska & Boyle, 2014; Male, 2011; Swain et al., 2012; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014).

### **The Effect of Severity of Disability on Teacher Attitude**

There are various disabilities that schools support with numerous resources. “Most common disabilities seen in schools fall under developmental concerns. This is a vast umbrella unto itself. Every child and every case is individually different” (“The Most Common Disabilities Seen in School”, n.d., para. 3). There are few studies (Alquraini, 2012; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Cook, 2001; Ferreria et al., 2017) that focus on the severity of a student’s disability on teacher attitude and Cook (2001) defined severe disabilities as “mental retardation, autism, hearing impairments, multiple disabilities, orthopedic disabilities, visual impairments, and other health impairments” (p. 206). Cook (2001) also observed that “teachers did not know how to provide instruction that [met] the unique needs of students with obvious disabilities” (p. 211). Casebolt and Hodge (2010) had similar findings regarding teacher attitude toward students with severe disabilities using a descriptive-qualitative case study approach. “The teachers believed that teaching [students with severe disabilities] is a more difficult and complex practice than teaching students with mild disabilities. [The teachers] struggled to plan, adapt, and modify class activities” (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010, p. 151). All teachers should have the knowledge and resources to adapt any curriculum or lesson to all students regardless of their disability.

One of the most successful ways to eradicate poverty is through education, which includes equitably educating children with disabilities (United Nations, 2017). Therefore, it is

important to continually study this particular phenomenon to understand why teachers tend to have a more negative attitude toward students with severe disabilities, and how to support a change in their attitudes.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

The current research showed general trends of teachers having a positive attitude toward inclusive education, the positive impact of professional development, and the tendency to have negative attitudes toward students with severe disabilities. Not all teachers work with students with severe disabilities. To improve teacher attitude and increase success for all students, it is essential to know how to best support teachers and understand how they feel toward students with severe disabilities.

Even though several studies (Alquraini, 2012; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Cook, 2001; Ferreria et al., 2017) investigated teacher attitude toward students with severe disabilities, there is a lack of studies that focus on a program that assists students with severe disabilities who have intellectual, social, self-management, communication, or medical needs in the general education classroom. One program that my district currently implements is a life skills program that specializes in educating and providing life skills to students with severe disabilities, and integrates those students in the general education classroom as much as possible. Life skills students, when appropriate, join general education classrooms with an assistant. Life skills students also have adaptive P.E. and music classes where general education students mentor and assist life skills students.

As a result, there are multiple opportunities for students and teachers to work with life skills students. Many general education students seek opportunities to assist with adaptive P.E. and music, as well as other opportunities such as walking them down the hall, entering another

classroom, or sitting next to them during an assembly. Since there are only four schools in the district that implement this program, it is essential to understand the effect it has upon teacher attitude toward inclusive education. The effect of this program on teachers will provide valuable feedback to district and program leaders.

Several studies (Batsious et al., 2008; Campbell, 2010; Monsen et al., 2014; Southern, 2010; Yan & Sin, 2015) used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical framework in a qualitative study. TPB's three interlinked variables (attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) form a behavioral intention that can predict a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). "Given adequate control over the behavior, individuals are likely to carry out their intentions" (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010, p. 141). Studying how life skills students affected the three variables that formulate a behavioral intention that predicts a certain behavior will help district leaders in understanding the effects on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

As a result, I used the TPB as a conceptual framework since it has been proved that the three variables together help predict a certain behavior. Using TPB in a qualitative study provided unique insight and themes from teachers. These themes will assist administrators with an understanding of the effects of a life skills program in a school, the supports and resources teachers need, as well as any future professional development. An intrinsic case study can "illustrate a unique case and needs to be described and detailed" (Creswell, 2010, p. 98). Using an intrinsic case study approach focusing on one school can lead to further comparative research across the school district.

## **Conclusion**

All children with or without disabilities have a right to an education. Each school differs in their structures for inclusive education, as there are no uniform, agreed upon methods to teach students with disabilities. The variances in methods combined with the attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education impacts the culture of a school (Wilde & Avarmidis, 2011). While some educators and parents believe that including students with disabilities in the general education classroom will impact the academic achievement of non-disabled students, Ruijs et al. (2010) found that belief to be unfounded. One factor that significantly impacts students' success is their teacher's attitude (Cook, 2001). Therefore, it is vital to continually research teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Each school and each classroom differs in its ability to practice inclusive education. Each student has unique needs and abilities that a teacher must work with daily. Additionally, with the increase of inclusive practices, students with disabilities have more access to the general education classroom. This includes students with severe disabilities. Some studies (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001) have shown that teachers tended to have a more negative attitude toward those students, which impacts student success. Not all schools serve students with severe disabilities, so it is essential to study schools that do serve these students and the effect they have on teacher attitude. The results can affect future decisions for educational leaders and educational success for all students.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This qualitative intrinsic case study sought to understand how a life skills program impacted teacher attitude in a suburban elementary school in Oregon. An intrinsic case study is a qualitative methodology where the researcher had a “genuine interest in the case [and] should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548). For this study, the researcher worked in the school district, and remained part of the effort to find and utilize best practices when working with inclusive education. Further, the researcher wanted to better understand teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education in a school with a life skills program and how the district can better support them. This study was conducted as a single site case study because the teachers at this particular school were considered one environment or bounded unit (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

This single site case study occurred at an elementary school that had a life skills program that serves students with severe disabilities. The life skills program aided the school in integrating special needs students into general education classrooms as much as possible. This was an effort to provide as much access as possible to grade level curriculum and peers. The school used a variety of inclusive methods for students with disabilities including full and partial inclusion, and accommodated or modified curriculum, all dependent on individual needs and abilities. The variation of methods was also dependent on the willingness of individual teachers. Modifying or accommodating curriculum or the environment took time. Ultimately it was up to the individual teacher to take the time to understand each student’s needs and what it took to meet those needs. A total of 20 classroom teachers (K–6), two life skills teachers, one special education teacher, a speech pathologist, an English language development teacher, a music

teacher, and a physical education teacher were employed at the school for the duration of this study.

Initially, a quantitative research approach was considered for this study. Quantitative research usually includes a larger, more random sampling of a population (Merriam, 1998). The early intention was to survey a significant number of elementary teachers across the district that both did and did not have a life skills classroom, compare and then generalize the results. However, sending surveys and not conversing with teachers would have lessened the opportunity to hear and learn of the unique experiences that teachers had regarding the impact of a life skills classroom in this specific school. Since researchers in quantitative studies studied many participants, it is more difficult to have meaningful contact with all participants (Merriam, 1998). In this research study, there were 10 teachers or specialists who participated in this study. The use of qualitative inquiry allowed participants the opportunity to share unique thoughts and ideas that a quantitative research study could not (Creswell, 2013), as qualitative research allows a researcher to study individuals “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2). Teachers and specialists were interviewed in their classrooms because it was their natural environment where inclusion occurred.

This study focused on answering “how” a life skills classroom affected teachers’ attitude toward inclusive education. Furthermore, the use of a case study meant that as a researcher, I “cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545) because the findings were based on the lived experience of the participants. Additionally, Creswell (2013) defined a case study as “described within certain parameters [that] study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information not lost by time”

(p. 98). Interviewing teachers at this particular school that had a life skills program provided a unique insight into teacher attitude toward inclusive education.

The school involved with this case study had a life skills program that the majority of other elementary schools in the district did not. There were 26 elementary schools in the district, and only four had a life skills program. The district provided some training for teachers. Yet, many teachers in this school were concerned about using inclusive practices without adequate support. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand if and how a life skills program impacted how teachers feel about inclusive education.

Case studies usually end with a conclusion about any themes discovered (Creswell, 2013). For this particular case study, the researcher attempted to discover any patterns in attitude and behavior from teachers toward inclusive education in a school, who worked with students with severe disabilities. Therefore, this case study was bounded by a single site and singular group of teachers that experienced teaching in a school with a life skills classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were designed using open-ended questions based on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). This allowed teachers to explain their feelings "without an agenda of what I hope to find" (Creswell, 2013, p. 52). Throughout each interview, pre-created questions based on the research questions were created with the potential to change based on the participants lived experience (Creswell, 2013). However, the questions did not change or vary:

1. How do life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impact teachers' views on inclusive education?

- a. How do (primary, intermediate, and specialist) teachers describe their attitude of and experience with inclusive education?
2. How do elementary teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that includes life skills students in the general education classroom?

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers and their attitudes toward inclusive education, who worked in a school that has a life skills classroom. The commonalities were within the school community and were not generalizable for the district, state, or country. Previous studies (Ahmed & Desai, 2007; Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Campbell, 2010; Forlin et al., 2014; Gökdere, 2012; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016) showed that teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusive education. However, studies (Alquraini, 2012; Sadioglu et al., 2013; Townsend, 2009) showed that teachers' attitude tended to be negative when working with students with severe disabilities. The assumption of this researcher was that the teachers of this site had a positive attitude toward inclusive education. However, with the increased amount of full inclusion and the addition of a primary life skills classroom, casual discussions toward inclusive practices waned.

A case study is a single unit that has boundaries (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). The single unit could be a person, class, or school. For this study, the bounded unit was both the school and the teachers within it. Merriam (1998) also stated that case studies set a boundary on data collection. A case study needs to have a boundary, regarding either the number of people interviewed or the number of observations (Merriam, 1998). There were a limited number of participants in this study that set the boundary. Yin (2003) stated that the results from "case

studies are not generalizable to populations, and that their purpose is to expand and generalize theories” (p. 10). Each school, whether it had a life skills program or not, had its own supports, structures, and culture that made its school environment unique and different from this case study. Therefore, the experiences that teachers had from this particular school were not generalized to another school with a life skills program.

This case study employed semistructured interviews with participants, to best understand their lived experience and perception of inclusive education in a school that included life skills students. The semistructured interviews contained open-ended questions, which required that researchers carefully listen (Creswell, 2013). Along with semistructured interviews, a demographic survey and shared artifacts were all used to collect data from participants. A demographic survey provided information on each participant and provided more insight on teacher attitude. The demographic survey was created by the researcher using the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) as a guide. The demographic survey provided information about participants such as years of teaching experience, gender, and age that revealed a few trends in attitude toward inclusive education. Semistructured interviews allowed for flexibility and a two-way communication with the participants (Pathak & Intratat, 2012), which gave them the opportunity to guide and share their thoughts about the topic.

The researcher decided to interview participants in their classroom because it was their natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While their classroom was not a neutral location, it provided an opportunity to share any documents or artifacts that clarified their attitude toward inclusive education. Interviewing participants in their classrooms allowed them to remember and access artifacts or examples. If participants were interviewed in a neutral

location, there was a possibility that participants may have forgotten artifacts or were unable to show certain areas in their room that were physically impossible to move to another location.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The school district involved in this study was one of the largest districts in the state of Oregon. The district runs over 30 schools, including elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, with over 1,000 teachers and 1,000 other staff members. The district also operates an online school and alternative school for 7–12 graders. The district was recommended for the system accreditation from AdvancED School System Accreditation Commission. The AdvancED Commission is a national accrediting system that recognizes school districts as a quality school system (“Media Release,” 2016). The district serves more than 20,000 students. Roughly 44% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities are approximately 15% of the population, approximately 30% are English language learners, and over 80 different languages are spoken (Oregon Department of Education 2016).

The participating school had an enrollment of nearly 550 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Students with disabilities represented over 10% of the student population; within this group approximately 35% were economically disadvantaged, approximately 20% were English language learners, and over 20 different languages were spoken (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). There were 26 general education teachers and specialists. Specialists included positions such as a physical education teacher, an educational resource specialist, and a life skills teachers.

This study used the maximum variation sampling method. Creswell (2013) stated that it is a popular method to use in qualitative studies because “the researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study [and] it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect

differences or different perspectives” (p. 157). The sample size consisted of eight general education teachers and two specialists. The researcher allowed for more participants to be added if the participants did not have enough experience with inclusion to formulate a distinct opinion, and data saturation was not reached. However, that was not the case, and the 10 participants were sufficient. Three teachers were chosen from primary grades (kindergarten–third grade), five from intermediate grades (fourth grade–sixth grade), and two specialists that worked with all grade levels. Google Forms were used to invite all teachers to respond whether they wanted to participate in the study. The researcher created the invitation through a secure Google log-in then sent out the Google Form invitation to all potential participants in the school. When teachers responded to the Google Form invitation, a setting that the researcher used imported all the results into a Google spreadsheet. Using Google Forms and spreadsheet ensured confidentiality because it allowed only the researcher to see the results from the respondents. The spreadsheet had the participants’ district email (this was how Google tracks respondents) as well as their answer whether they were interested in participating.

After all the teachers had an opportunity to respond to the Google invitation, those who were willing to participate were then grouped together as primary teachers, intermediate teachers, or specialist. From these groups, the researcher chose 10 participants with the most varied teaching experience. The researcher looked for differences in years of teaching experience as well as years taught at the school. This ensured maximum variation because it “fully describe[d] multiple perspectives about the case” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156).

### **Instrumentation**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the key instrument that collects data through observations, documentations, or interviews (Creswell, 2012). The type of instrumentation that

was used for this study was interviews. A demographic survey was another type of instrumentation used. Documents “might be developed at the investigator’s request, more are produced independently of the research study and thus offer a valuable resource for confirming insights gained through interviews and observations” (Merriam, 1998, Location 56). Participants were asked to prepare any artifacts or documentation that supported their opinions and thoughts about inclusive education.

Semistructured interviews were also used based on the chance that a participant could not be interviewed again (Bernard, 2000). However, this was not the case during data collection. Participants were interviewed one time, using open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide unstructured answers. Open-ended questions helped guide the interview and shape future questions (Creswell, 2013). Those future questions, or probing questions were not created ahead of time because they were based on the answers of the participants (Merriam, 1998). The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. This proved advantageous because probing questions were asked (Merriam, 1998). The ability to ask probing questions helped clarify answers during the interview. Probing questions were made because participants were interviewed by a researcher, unlike in a paper survey, in which there are no interactions between researcher and participants.

The interview process could have created “a power imbalance through a hierarchical relationship” between the interviewer and participant (Creswell, 2013, p. 60). Interviewing participants did not present an imbalance of power because the researcher had only been a teacher at the school. For an imbalance to occur, the researcher would have had to have experience as an administrator, which is not the case. The researcher ensured each participant’s

confidentiality throughout the study's process. To answer the research questions, the researcher sought complete, truthful answers from participants.

Participants were asked to bring artifacts to strengthen the researcher's understanding of the participants' attitude toward inclusive education. Artifacts, as related to students with disabilities, are tools that are specially used to enhance or help with their learning (Merriam, 1998). Artifacts provided another source of data that assisted with triangulation or establishing validity in a case study (Merriam, 1998). If teachers were supporting students with disabilities, there should be artifacts that supported their perspective because they were modifying or accommodating the environment or curriculum.

### **Data Collection**

The one-on-one interviews were conducted in a live, natural setting. Creswell (2012) stated that qualitative researchers "gather up-close information by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context" (p. 46). The natural setting was where participants experienced inclusion in their classrooms. Teachers were interviewed in the classroom where they showed any artifacts or documentation that supported their opinion about inclusive education.

Interviews were held before and after school to provide teachers with adequate time to answer questions and not have concerns about day-to-day responsibilities. Throughout the school, classrooms had both students with severe disabilities and students with severe behavioral issues. Many staff members were willing to help another teacher with any challenging student. This was part of the school culture that was created many years ago. If available, staff members would help others. However, with that support also came opportunities for teachers to discuss

issues that could change an opinion. The researcher wanted a “snapshot” of opinions within the school. Therefore, all interviews were conducted in as short of a timeframe as possible.

The researcher recorded all interviews using the application Voice Recorder. Notes were taken during the interview because not all information was recorded. Information that was unable to be recorded included any physical cues or documents that participants shared. As all participants worked in the same school as the researcher, scheduling a second follow-up interview and/or time for clarifying questions proved logistically possible. After all interviews were thoroughly conducted, the researcher created a transcript of each interview. The transcripts were analyzed, and the results interpreted, with detailed focus “on a few key issues, not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case” (Creswell, 2013, p. 101). Focusing on the key issues ensured that the research questions were answered as clearly as possible.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The consistent factor in this study was the life skills classroom that supported students with severe disabilities. One of the attributes in this study was the teachers’ attitudes. The teachers’ attitudes were dependent on their experiences in inclusive education. Other attributes were the types of demographic data including, but not limited to, age, gender, years in the classroom, years at the school being studied, and level of education. Another attribute in this study was the baseline questions that participants were asked. All interviews began with simple demographic questions that included teaching experience, age, and gender. Next, all participants had the same baseline of questions regarding their experience and opinions about inclusive education. The interview questions were based on the Multidimensional Attitudes toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008). The MATIES was developed to measure

the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of teacher attitude toward inclusive education (Mahat, 2008). Other studies (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Yan & Sin, 2015) used the MATIES questions, but in a quantitative manner. The baseline questions based on the MATIES led to probing or clarifying questions. These varied with each participant because it depended on their answer. Semistructured interviews allowed for research questions to be answered, but provided participants the opportunity to speak freely about their opinions (Mattson & Roll-Pettersson, 2007).

The research questions were answered through face-to-face interviews. Open-ended questions about inclusive practices such as “How do inclusive practices such as full inclusion affect your classroom?” began the interview. From that point, probing questions such as “What supports do you and your students need to have a more successful inclusive classroom?” helped answer the second research question. Cumulatively, the data collected helped faculty, administration, and the district understand not only what was working well in the realm of inclusive education but how to continue best practices that will lead to success for all students and teachers.

The interview questions were vetted by several sources. The district in which this study occurred approved of the interview questions. The researcher also had a conference with the head of student services in the district. After the study was approved by the IRB, the researcher piloted the interview questions and received feedback from other teachers in the district who did not work at the case study school. Piloting the interview questions assisted with refining the researchers’ interview skills, ensuring both recording devices worked properly, and solidified the questions.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Analyzing data in a qualitative study can vary, depending on the type of study used (Creswell, 2013). Data was organized chronologically or categorically. The data was also presented in a descriptive and narrative fashion to enhance the participants' answers (Merriam, 1998). For this study, data was presented in a narrative, categorical fashion. The topics based on data were dependent on participants' answers but included attitudes toward inclusive education, supports needed to practice successful inclusive education, and professional development surrounding inclusive education. Teachers' answers were used as documentation, clarification, and support of the topics created.

The data analysis followed steps created by Huberman and Miles (1994). The steps included writing notes, reflecting on those notes, drafting a summary of notes, and creating and counting the frequency of codes of each transcribed interview (Creswell, 2013). As participants were interviewed, they were recorded, and notes were taken. Right after each interview, a reflection on the interview and the notes taken were accounted. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used the audio recordings and typed each transcript on a separate Google Doc. Typing a verbatim transcript of the interviews was time-consuming; however, when the researcher transcribed an interview it provided an opportunity to become more familiar with the data (Merriam, 1998). The idea of using a transcriber app was considered, but after piloting the app, the decision was made to personally transcribe the interviews to have a closer relationship with the data.

Based on Creswell's (2013) idea, codes were based on frequent phrases that occurred throughout the interviews, which assisted in creating categories. First, open coding was used to create categories of information (Creswell, 2013). Open coding consisted of creating categories

from phrases from the data (Creswell, 2013). After categorizing the data, there were conceptual links between categories (Merriam, 1998). Creating a diagram of the categories helped determine if more analysis was needed and to continue with axial coding. Axial coding assisted with discovering the connections between the supporting data to one major category and was used many times after open coding (Creswell, 2013). The researcher did not transition to axial coding because there was not one specific category that was overwhelmingly supported through open coding.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, all participants were asked to check interviews for accuracy prior to use in the study, otherwise known as member checking. Merriam (1998) stated that one strategy to increase internal validity is member checking. Member checking is when a researcher takes any data and “tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and ask them if the results are plausible” (Location No. 2450). It was essential to accurately understand and record the experiences of all participants. Transcripts were shared with participants on a Google Doc where both the researcher and participant made changes and comments on the same document.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Nearly all qualitative studies are limited because they are not generalizable (Creswell, 2013). There are also other limitations within qualitative studies. A limitation to this research design was the potential bias from both the researcher and the participants. The researcher worked with the participants and shared numerous conversations about inclusion and the struggles attributed to its practice. Researchers who are the interviewers have an inherent limitation because they are human (Merriam, 1998). Humans as instruments are where “mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere” (Merriam, 1998,

Location 319). There was a possibility for errors from mishearing or misinterpreting during of the interview. However, the Voice application recorder allowed the researcher to listen to interviews multiple times and at a slower pace. The researcher also created a transcript that was sent to all participants to clarify any errors.

Qualitative researchers who are the instrument collecting the data need to be sensitive to the biases that inevitably occur during this type of research (Merriam, 1998). As the interviewer, it was vital that at the beginning of the interview the researcher implored honest answers from participants. Merriam (1998) explained the political nature linked to educational case studies. Within the system, what people think, how they act, how others' view what they are doing, and what they are actually doing may not align (MacDonald & Walker, 1977 as cited in Merriam, 1998). To confront any biases that may have occurred by participants, the researcher paid considerable attention to what was being said, any nonverbal communication, as well as prior conversations about inclusion with each participant. Depending on the relationship with the participant, the researcher addressed prior conversations and assumptions that may have impeded honest answers from the participant.

**Delimitations.** Qualitative researchers accepted that many results are not generalizable because “the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p.101). There were three other schools that had a life skills classroom within the district. At first, the researcher of this study pondered a comparison study between the schools. However, to understand and share the unique experiences of the teachers at this particular school, the researcher decided not to do a comparison study.

There was a total of 10 teachers that were interviewed. There were three teachers who taught grades kindergarten through third grade, five teachers who taught fourth through sixth

grade, and two specialists. The reasoning behind the three groups of participants was the structure of the life skills classrooms in the school. The school has had an intermediate (fourth through sixth grade) life skills program since the school opened, while the primary (kindergarten through third grade) life skills program moved to the school the previous school year. The two groups of teachers may potentially have had different perspectives and experiences with students with severe disabilities who were assigned to a life skills classroom. A specialist had a different perspective and experience with students with severe disabilities as they did not have a singular class of students. Even though the results were not generalizable or transferable, the structure and results can help future studies regarding schools that have a life skills program and how it affects teachers' attitude toward inclusive education. Inclusive education is becoming more of a common practice in many classrooms, as well as legally required in certain cases. Therefore, this study is valuable for those particular schools that have a similar life skills program.

### **Validation**

A qualitative study must have trustworthiness to be valid (Creswell, 2013). To increase the trustworthiness of this study there were several procedures that were put into place. First, all participants remained anonymous. The anonymity protected the confidentiality of what participants shared during the interview (Creswell, 2013). The interviews took place in the classroom where the participants taught. To maintain confidentiality, the interviews occurred after school with the door closed. Numerous times throughout the school year teachers met with other teachers in their classrooms with the door closed for various meetings. Teachers at the school where the study occurred were extremely respectful and did not enter the room unless it was for the utmost importance. Therefore, the staff at the school were used to this practice of not entering if the door was closed. If a staff member were to knock on the door during an

interview, the interview would stop and no mention of what was occurring would be identified to assist with confidentiality. This situation did not occur during the 10 interviews. The researcher had been in nearly all the classrooms at some point due to other job responsibilities such as the technology facilitator, union representative, and testing coordinator. Having the researcher in a different grade level classroom was not unusual at the school. It was vital for teachers to be interviewed in their room to have the opportunity to show specific areas or documentation that was in their classrooms.

The researcher was a co-worker of the participants in the study. Since all participants agreed to be interviewed, they were willing to share their opinions and experiences. Interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences, and may even be therapeutic (Merriam, 1998). The relationship between the researcher and each participant remained unbiased and professional because the researcher's job is to listen and collect data not, change the person's opinion (Patton 1990, as cited in Merriam, 1998). The intention of the researcher was to uncover any themes through the interview process. The researcher used open coding to ensure that there were no biases toward certain ideas or themes. The coding process discouraged biases because it was based on the frequency of phrases spoken in an interview.

All notes and recorded taping of interviews were on a password protected laptop and iPhone. The iPhone was the primary recording device and the laptop a secondary, back-up device. After an interview, a transcript of the interview was provided to the participant to check for accuracy. The transcript was typed on a Google Doc and "shared" with the participant. Once each transcript was typed, the associated recording was deleted from both the researcher's iPhone and laptop. Participants were asked to review and correct any errors in the transcript using a different color font or highlight a certain area and leave a comment on the document for

clarification. Using Google Docs was a fast and accurate method for two people to collaborate on a shared document. The shared document was password enabled for both the researcher and participant. No other person had access to the document unless the participant chose to share it with another person. The researcher did not hear of any participant sharing their document with another person.

Names of participants were not used. Instead, each participant was given a pseudonym. The use of a pseudonym protected their identity and maintained confidentiality. To ensure dependability or reliability, the researcher provided any biases or assumptions about the theory. The researcher was aware of any bias and its influences on the investigation (Merriam, 1998). The researcher taught at the same school as the participants and had numerous conversations both professionally and causally with many potential participants. To ensure dependability, any past conversations that occurred with any of the participants as well personal biases about inclusive education was acknowledged.

### **Expected Findings**

The expected findings in this research were partially based on the literature, but also strongly based on past discussions with faculty and several administrators. Through both professional and casual conversations with various faculty members, it was perceived by the researcher that most teachers agreed with the idea of inclusive education. However, most teachers struggled with the lack of training and level of support necessary to create and maintain a successful inclusive classroom. Ko and Boswell (2013) concluded similar findings that teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusive education but felt they were not adequately trained or supported to have success. If teachers perceived that they had enough support, their attitude toward inclusive education tended to be more positive (Ahmmed, 2013).

Furthermore, teachers tended to have a more negative attitude toward students with severe disabilities (Alquraini, 2012; Cook 2001). Since many teachers in the school (where this study occurred) already seemed to have a less than positive attitude, the expected finding is that any positive attitude toward students with severe disabilities would decrease because of the lack of support. Many times, when life skills students were mainstreamed, a general education student was partnered to help mentor the student. Some teachers have voiced concern that general education students lost the opportunity to learn necessary standards or skills at the expense of mentoring a life skills student. The expected finding was that teachers had a negative attitude toward inclusive education with students with severe disabilities, primarily because of the lack of support provided.

Some of the expectations were founded. Those that were and were not met added to the list of needs and supports to the literature regarding inclusive education. It also provided specific reasons for teachers having a certain attitude toward inclusive education. The study along with other literature helped administrators and teachers find success with inclusive education.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues can occur at any point in the qualitative research process, not just during the data collection phase (Creswell, 2013). Participants in the study had a minimal risk and there was minimal involved risk of ethical issues. The study was submitted for approval to the Concordia University–Portland’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). It was also submitted for approval to the participating school district as well as the principal of the school where the study was conducted. Participants were provided with a consent form that explained the purpose of the study, a description of procedures, any risks and benefits, confidentiality, and their right to

withdraw from the study. The consent form enabled participants to fully understand any risks and provided an opportunity to discontinue participation at any point.

The researcher worked in the same school as the participants. As a co-worker, there was no conflict of interest with the information being shared. The researcher held participants' identifying information in utmost confidence. There was no identifying information in the study. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect any identifying information. The researcher transcribed all interviews on a password protected laptop and the recorder on an iPhone that was password protected. Hence, no other individuals or parties had access to participants' responses.

One potential risk was that participants had the potential of being identified based on their responses to interview questions. Creswell (2013) stated that researchers develop "case studies of individuals that represent a composite picture rather than an individual picture" (p. 174). The researcher disregarded any specific identifying incidents or experiences in the study and generalized situations to protect the identity of participants. When participants spoke of a particular student or certain incident during the interview, the researcher rephrased or omitted specific identifying information to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The researcher also disregarded gender identity and specific job title to maintain confidentiality.

### **Summary**

This qualitative intrinsic case study sought to understand teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in a school that included students with severe disabilities. The researcher provided a deeper understanding of both the teacher attitudes and needs to have a successful inclusive classroom. This occurred through individual interviews, demographic surveys, and artifact collection. The researcher used coding and anticipated certain themes through the interviews. Chapter 3 provided descriptive methods used for this particular study. The research

questions that were answered in the study were: How does a life skills classroom (that serves students with severe disabilities) impact teachers' views on inclusive education and how do teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that had a life skills classroom that supports students with severe disabilities. The details in this chapter included the process of sampling methods, data collection and analysis, and any limitations and ethical issues pertaining to the study. Once the data was collected and analyzed, the results aided the continual research and understanding of how to best support teachers and students with severe disabilities in public schools. The data also encouraged further, more comparative studies about teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education regarding students with severe disabilities.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how life skills students impact general education elementary teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This chapter provides a description of the participant sample used as well as a table that provides the information from a demographic survey. Descriptors of study participants were also provided to assist in understanding each person's unique background and experience. The research methodology and research design used, and the step-by-step process implemented throughout the collection of data and analysis is explained. The summary of the findings provides an overview of the results. Those results are discussed in detail in the data and results section. An analysis of the data is presented at this chapter's conclusion.

### **Description of Sample**

The sample population consisted of general education teachers and specialists from a public elementary school located in suburban Oregon. The elementary school first opened more than 15 years ago and is part of one of the largest school districts in Oregon. The participating school consisted of grades kindergarten through sixth with a primary and intermediate life skills classroom. In 2017, nearly 550 students were served at the elementary school. The school's teachers consisted of 26 general education teachers and specialists. Specialists included positions such as a physical education teacher, an educational resource specialist, and a life skills teachers.

The participants in the study were selected using a maximum variation sampling method. This method was chosen because it provided a diverse range of attributes from the participants (Creswell, 2013). Participants consisted of 10 teachers placed into three different groupings:

- primary teachers (kindergarten through third grade);

- intermediate teachers (fourth through sixth grade); and
- specialists.

A minimum of three teachers from both the primary and intermediate group and two teachers from the specialists group participated to ensure sufficiency of data for analysis. The sample group included three teacher members from the primary group, five teacher members from the intermediate group, and two specialists. When the participants' demographic data was analyzed, the intermediate group had more variation in teaching experience both as a career and at the school. There was also among the participants more variation with the years of experience working with life skills students, which led to the decision to include additional teachers from this group.

All persons invited to participate through a Google survey were provided a consent form prior to their participation and completed a demographic survey before being interviewed. The demographic survey provided information about the participant's years as a teacher, years at the elementary school, their gender, age, and educational level. As shown in Table 4.1, the data collected from the demographic survey was presented. Some of the demographic information, i.e., gender and specific job assignment, was omitted to maintain the participant's confidentiality. Gender-neutral pseudonyms were also used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Bobbie, Alex, and Casey, the three primary (kindergarten through third grade) participants, possessed varying experiences in both teaching and in working with life skills students. Bobbie experienced working with life skills students in the general education classroom. Both Alex and Casey experienced working with life skills students in the general education classroom. An additional fact about Casey was that Casey also had a son with a severe disability and experienced navigating throughout the educational system.

The five intermediate group participants (fourth through sixth grade) reported more variation in teaching experience and in working with life skills students than the other two groups. Additional participants were chosen from the intermediate group because, at the time of the school's initial opening, it included only an intermediate life skills program. This provided additional opportunities for intermediate teachers to have had experience with life skills students. Currently, there was a primary and an intermediate life skills program at the participating school. The five intermediate group participants were Pat, Drew, Tyler, Riley, and Logan. Pat did not have any experience working with life skills students in the general education classroom. All of Drew's 10 years of teaching experience occurred at the participants' elementary school and throughout those years had life skills students in the general education classroom. Tyler, a newer teacher to the profession, worked with life skills students in the general education classroom. During the time of the interview, a student from the life skills classroom attended Riley's general education classroom daily. A student from the life skills classroom also attended Logan's general education classroom daily.

The two specialists, Kelly and Jamie, reported different experiences working with life skills students. Kelly's position had not provided daily opportunities to work individually with life skills students. Additionally, in the past year Kelly, taught one lesson to the intermediate life skills class. Even though Kelly's experience working with life skills students was limited, Kelly also taught guidance lessons to all grade levels and there were times when life skills students were present in the general education classroom. Jamie taught for more than 10 years and life skills students regularly attended Jamie's classroom.

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics*

Teacher (pseudonym)	Job Assignment	Years of Experience	Years at School
Alex	Primary	> 20 years	> 10 years
Casey	Primary	> 20 years	> 10 years
Bobbie	Primary	> 20 years	< 5 years
Pat	Intermediate	> 10 years	< 5 years
Drew	Intermediate	> 10 years	> 10 years
Tyler	Intermediate	< 5 years	< 5 years
Riley	Intermediate	< 5 years	< 5 years
Logan	Intermediate	> 10 years	< 5 years
Kelly	Specialist	> 20 years	< 5 years
Jamie	Specialist	> 10 years	< 10 years

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

There were 26 potential participants who were general education teachers or specialists in the school. The data collection phase of the study began with sending a Google survey to all potential participants in the same school. All potential participants were sent two emails that included the Google survey. Two days after the second email was sent to the potential participants, 10 participants were chosen using the maximum variation sampling method. The following day, all 10 participants were notified of their participation in this study.

All semistructured interviews were held in the individual participant’s classroom or office space. Prior to the day of the interview, participants were provided with and then signed a consent form. Interviews were recorded using the Voice Recorder app on the researcher’s iPhone and laptop. The researcher’s iPhone was used as a primary recording device and the researcher’s laptop was a secondary, back-up device. Both devices were password protected. Participants were aware that they were being recorded and that the researcher would personally transcribe the interviews. Transcribing the interviews by hand provided the researcher with an

opportunity to become more familiar with the data (Merriam, 1998). The researcher created Google folders for each interviewee and notes from each interview were kept in the participants' folder. The researcher took notes on a secure laptop throughout all interviews. Using semistructured interviews provided participants the opportunity to speak freely about their opinions and retell their experiences (Mattson & Roll-Pettersson, 2007). Before asking any interview questions, the participants filled out the short demographic survey on paper while the researcher prepared the recording devices. The researcher began each interview with the same question, and all interviews lasted approximately 20–40 minutes.

Using the participants' audio recordings, the researcher personally typed each participant's interview on a Google Document (doc). The act of transcribing the interviews personally permitted the researcher to have a closer relationship with the data. By listening to the interviews numerous times, the researcher noted intonations and nuances in the participants' voices, thereby adding to the richness of their message. The Voice Recorder app on the iPhone permitted the researcher to listen to the interview at half the speed. This was invaluable as it allowed the researcher to both transcribe and comprehend each interview. The researcher read and re-read each transcription before sending a copy to the participant to ensure member checking. Member checking was one strategy used to increase internal validity (Merriam, 1998). Due to limited options of time for participating classroom teachers, interviews took place before or after school over four school weeks. Each participant approved of their transcribed interview within two to four days of receiving them, which allowed the researcher to begin the coding process.

Categories were created based on phrases that frequently appeared throughout the interviews using open coding. Open coding consists of creating categories from major ideas

found or discovered within the collected data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher read through each interview one at a time. Frequent phrases were searched for, counted, and highlighted. Each phrase or code was highlighted a different color, but the colors remained consistent within all interviews. A key was created and placed at the bottom of each interview that included the highlighted codes with the amount of times each code appeared in the transcript. Initially, 36 codes were identified from all participant interviews. Following a more in-depth comparison of participant interviews, 20 original categories were identified and presented as *20 Initially identified interview categories* (Table 4.2). Identifying the 20 categories allowed the reduction of dozens of codes into more succinct categories. The 20 categories are listed in alphabetical order.

Table 2  
*20 Initially Identified Interview Categories*

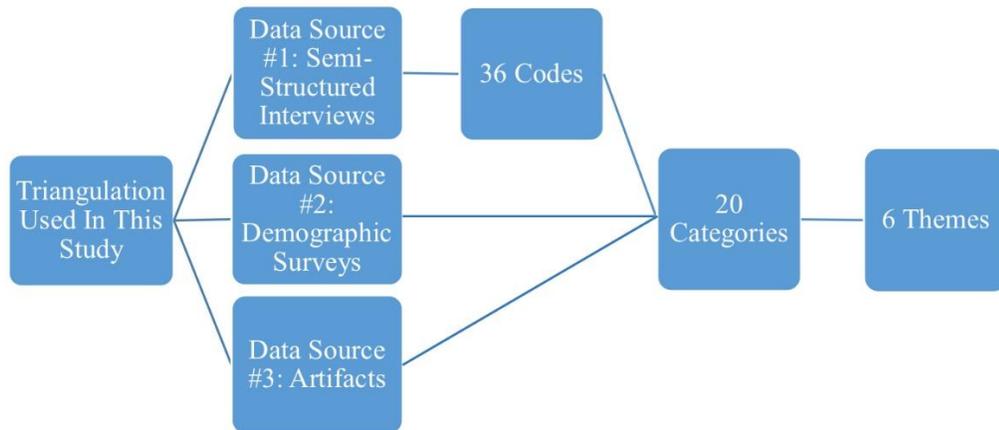
Administrators need to trust teachers	Behavioral issues	IEPs must be followed	IEPs need to be clearly written
Impedes learning	Increasing responsibilities and stress will make faculty or staff leave	Life skills students create a better community	Medical issues
More time to work with students for repetition	More planning time	More training (PD) for teachers	Need assistants to be better trained and qualified
Need more assistants	Positive experiences	Teachers were willing to do anything to help students	Teachers need more curriculum
Teachers need/want specialized training for life skills students	Teachers want life skills students in the general education classroom	Teachers want smaller class sizes	Unable to teach grade level curriculum to all students

From these 20 categories, six themes and several subthemes were identified by condensing similarly overarching themes as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 3  
*Six Themes and Subthemes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
Benefits of inclusion outweighed negative impact	Inclusion built a diverse school culture Inclusion encouraged tolerance, acceptance, and provides opportunities to be a role model
Disruptive behavior impacted classroom dynamic	All students deserve to learn in a safe environment
Inappropriate behaviors impeded the learning of students	No subtheme identified
Teachers need more time to prepare accommodations	Teachers had difficulty meeting accommodations Teachers had difficulty differentiating lessons Class size has an impact on teacher engagement
Inclusion required a specialized skill set for teachers that necessitated additional training	Teachers need specialized training
Additional qualified assistants were needed in increasingly diverse classrooms	Qualified assistants in the classroom all day

Triangulation was used to enhance internal validation (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation consists of “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, Location 2446). This study used multiple sources of data including semistructured interviews, demographic surveys, and artifacts. After reading through all interview transcripts and comparing repetitive phrases to the demographic survey, and other artifacts including an explanation of the classroom layout, sufficient sources of data assisted with triangulation in this case study (Merriam, 1998). Figure 1 provides a visual on how triangulation was used in this study.



*Figure 3.* Triangulation used in this qualitative singular case study.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The findings from this study revealed that all teachers in this study in general had a favorable view, and encouraged the inclusion of life skills students in their classrooms. Even though participating teachers reported some drawbacks of including life skills students in their classroom, they found the experience of including life skills students in their classroom to be a valuable experience for all students. As expressed by primary teacher, Casey, inclusion built tolerance, flexibility, and empathy. Casey experienced inclusion when there were extremes in the general education classroom and reflected that “kids can reach out empathetically or intellectually.” Casey concluded that for life skills students, “modeling and being around kids that are developing in a more typical manner” was beneficial. Alex shared a similar outlook and articulated:

It’s our job [as teachers] to help our kids to be able to go out to the world at a later time to learn that sometimes there are people who are way different than what they are. That’s part of our job to teach them.

All teachers in this study believed the life skills program at their school created a more diverse, inclusive school community that benefits all students. However, there were several concerns that participating teachers shared regarding the inclusion of not only life skills students, but students that had behavioral, intellectual, and/or emotional disabilities in the general education classroom. This study found that even though participating teachers wanted and understood the benefits of inclusive education, the added academic, emotional, and social diversity increased the responsibility of the teachers. Jamie shared that there was another level of decision making that falls on teachers, “I have to be careful and make sure when they [life skills students] are here that they are going to be safe.” When given the option, and still in accordance with a student’s IEP, Jamie made decisions in the past to not permit certain life skills students in Jamie’s classroom because “they yell, scream, hit, bang their heads, and run away.” Jamie had to find other ways to meet the needs of those students which usually entailed teaching lessons in the life skills classroom.

Participants in this study also expressed that they needed additional specialized supports to provide a successful inclusive classroom. Teachers in this study explained that they needed more time, additional qualified assistants, and more specialized training to meet the needs of the inclusive students. An intermediate teacher, Logan, recounted that teachers need “more time. Teachers need more time to work with the assistants so when they do come in, they are used most effectively. And also time and training of the assistants.” Participating teachers also spoke about the safety of all the students in the general education classroom. Tyler stated that the only time life skills students should not be encouraged to participate in the general education classroom was when that “student pushing in wasn’t able to be safe for the student themselves or the homeroom students.” This study found that when students behaved in a manner deemed

unsafe to themselves or others, it caused harm to the classroom culture, it damaged relationships between students, and caused general education students to fear students with severe disabilities.

Findings of this study also indicated there was a slight difference between the views of primary and intermediate teachers regarding the academic abilities of life skills students. Intermediate teachers showed additional concern about the difficulty of differentiating curriculum for life skills students due to a significant gap in the students' academic ability. Tyler experienced frustrations because of the stress to teach grade level standards and described, "in general, what I have seen so far is that life skills kids, they may copy it down. Maybe. But it doesn't mean anything to them. We can't have a conversation with them." It should be noted that primary teachers did not share this same concern. Primary teachers believed that primary life skills students had the potential to learn grade level curriculum if it was differentiated and scaffolded to meet their needs. When asked in what situations can students with disabilities learn grade level curriculum Alex simply stated, "anywhere it can be taught." All participating teachers believed that all students were capable of learning, but when a student's academic ability was several grades below what was being taught, there was a genuine concern shared about the amount of time it would take for students to learn the curriculum.

Participating teachers also had concerns about the design of inclusive education. All teachers interviewed shared a belief that inclusion was a positive experience and something that was needed. However, participating teachers believed that when including students with severe disabilities, stakeholders involved in the decision should also look at the included student in the context of the entire classroom in a holistic way. This could include the dynamics among the included student and other general education students, the availability of support and staffing, and the behavioral appropriateness of the included student. Teachers in this study wanted to

include all students, but for successful inclusion to occur it ideally required additional highly trained assistants in each classroom.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

This study presented two primary research questions and one secondary question. The first primary question was “How do the inclusion of life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impact teachers’ views on inclusive education?” A subquestion to that was “How do (primary, intermediate, and specialist) teachers describe their attitude of, and experience with, inclusive education? The second primary question was “How do elementary teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that includes life skills students in the general education classroom? To answer each question, all interviews were coded and analyzed. In response to the research questions, six themes were identified: (a) benefits of inclusion outweighed negative impact, (b) disruptive behavior impacted classroom dynamic, (c) inappropriate behaviors impeded the learning of students, (d) teachers need more time to prepare accommodations, (e) inclusion required a specialized skill set for teachers that necessitated additional training, and (f) additional qualified assistants were needed in increasingly diverse classrooms.

#### **Benefits of Inclusion Outweighed Negative Impact**

Participating teachers tended to have a positive view of the inclusion of life skills students in the general education classroom. Teachers in this study wanted, and many times encouraged, the inclusion of life skills students in their classrooms. Many participating teachers found numerous benefits from the inclusion of life skills students in the general education classroom. One of the most significant benefits was the socialization aspect for both students with severe disabilities and general education students.

When asked about the benefits of including life skills students, or students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom, Tyler noted:

I do think there is a benefit to that (the inclusion of life skills students) because when you have life skills and gen ed kids integrating in a classroom, there is that socialization piece where I am no longer afraid of the kids I see at the grocery store. I know that that they like to color like I do, or they like to do whatever.

Participating teachers believed that the benefits of inclusion assisted with the mental and social growth of all students. This mental and social growth had benefits because students were able to experience diverse children and situations not only in school but outside of school.

**Inclusion built a diverse school culture.** Tyler believed that a socialization piece occurred in inclusive classrooms, and schools were one of the places where children learned about others and their differences. Casey affirmed, “Schools are probably the main place that our children are going to see people with severe differences.” Kelly thought that inclusion was “useful for students to get to know kids who have developmental delays and challenges.” Alex provided a comparable response and stated that including life skills students offered opportunities where students “learn to have empathy toward others that learn in a different way. It would make me sad that kids would experience rejection anywhere.” When asked how inclusion assists with facilitating socially appropriate behavior, Bobbie believed that it benefited the school community. Bobbie replied that, “I think it is a better community when they are in our building. I think everybody benefits. I wish that there was more integration with life skills kids than what we have.” This study found that the inclusion of life skills students created a unique opportunity to build a diverse school culture where students learned about a variety of differences.

**Inclusion encouraged tolerance and acceptance, and provides opportunities to be a role model.** Teachers in this study believed that inclusion provided an opportunity for students to learn about tolerance and acceptance of those who were different. These opportunities were created in a safe school environment and had a lasting impact on students. Casey declared that inclusion “builds tolerance” in students. Kelly also noticed that inclusion “reduces fear [in students]. It helps them to know individuals as a human being, as a person. Not someone who is scary, scary looking, or talks differently.” One of the findings revealed in this study was that accepting people’s differences was an important skill for all students to have not only in school, but outside of school as well.

Based on the data from this study, inclusion encouraged students to tolerate and accept people who were different from them. Jamie had several years of experience working with life skills students in the classroom and experienced students that went beyond tolerance. Jamie recounted, “They are very supportive of that student. They welcome them into the classroom. They don’t feel any different about it. So it’s just like any other student, I feel like that helps the inclusion student to feel normalized.” In Jamie’s experience not only did general education students build tolerance but they also learned to support students with severe disabilities as they would support any other student. Drew described similar experiences of support with the inclusion of life skills students. Drew noticed that, “When [general education students] know they need to be a good role model, they might step up to that. Those kids kind of took a role of being a leader when the life skills kids joined us.” Participants in this study stated that inclusion provided opportunities for students to be role models. Those opportunities were important for student growth. Logan had a similar experience when students stepped into a role of being a

positive role model. In Logan's situation, even parents became aware of the positive impact of inclusion. Logan described the experience of students becoming positive role models:

The best thing they are getting in here are the social interactions and learning what is acceptable. (My) parents really loved that we were buddies with them (life skills students). And they really found that it was really good for their kids to see that there were kids who have challenges and live a different way, learn a different way, learn different things in school than they do. So they really liked it.

Teachers in this study acknowledged that there were numerous benefits for the inclusion of life skills students for both the life skills student and the general education student. Those benefits are:

- A school is a safe place for students to learn about differences in people and to learn tolerance and acceptance.
- The inclusion of life skills students tends to have a positive impact on inclusive education, especially regarding the socialization and normalization of students with severe disabilities.
- This builds a more diverse school where students learn tolerance, acceptance, and how to be a positive role model.

### **Disruptive Behavior Impacted Classroom Dynamic**

Participants realized the importance of inclusive education. However, when students with severe disabilities displayed disruptive, unsafe behaviors to themselves or others, they preferred not to have that student included. Several teachers in this study cautioned that if students showed disruptive behaviors, then they were not academically, emotionally, and socially ready to be with general education peers. That disruptive behavior was not only detrimental for

the student with a severe disability but impacted the classroom dynamic. Pat claimed, “You can actually unravel a really good environment with the wrong kinds of behaviors happening.”

There were a variety of disruptive behaviors that can impact a classroom’s dynamics, such as prolonged screaming, inappropriate touching, and furniture throwing. Participating teachers shared their concerns about disruptive behaviors that created an unsafe classroom. However, the most concerning disruptions were the behaviors that were dangerous not only for that individual student, but the bystanders around that student.

**All students deserve to learn in a safe environment.** Teachers in this study had major concerns with inclusion when students with severe disabilities displayed unsafe behaviors.

Participating teachers stated that they wanted inclusion to occur in their classrooms. However, the safety of the students was their number one priority. When asked in what situations are you not willing to include students with severe disabilities in the classroom, Alex articulated that if “there was a chance that something could set them off or could make them have a behavior that would be harmful to them or to others in the class, I would not be ok with them in the classroom.” Jamie shared similar feelings when asked that same question, and recounted “when I have a student who’s a danger to themselves or to me or to other students, I have to be a priority because I can’t let anybody get hurt.” Jamie explained, “I’ve had those situations and safety is really important to me and keeping the student safe.”

Even though Pat had never worked with life skills students in the general education classroom, Pat recounted discussions with other teachers at this school and their experiences with unsafe behaviors. Pat’s concern was not only for the student who displayed unsafe behaviors, but for the mental state of the other general education students in the same classroom. Pat described, “If the way that you relate to kids is throwing chairs at them, that doesn’t really

work.” Pat shared a concern that, “they [general education students] may come to school for the next 20 days, but they might not feel safe coming to school for the next 20 days.” This study found that keeping all students safe in the classroom was what participating teachers stated was more important to them than inclusion.

When students with severe disabilities displayed unsafe behaviors, it was a detriment to themselves because their basic needs were not being met. However, it was important to understand why that student behaved in such an unsafe manner. During Casey’s interview, when asked, “when are you not willing to encourage inclusion in the general education classroom?” Casey stated that if inclusion caused life skills students “angst beyond what seems humane. Mental anguish. If they are going back to another place and curling up in a fetal position because we tried to socialize them, then we need to quit trying to meet our own needs.” Casey expressed strongly that when students are reverting back to behaviors that showed they cannot regulate their emotions, keeping them in the classroom was not what was best for them.

Several teachers in this study explained that when students who were included showed unsafe behaviors, it led to the opposite effect intended. Several participating teachers explained that the unsafe behaviors caused behavioral regressions in that student as well as others to fear the student with a disability or automatically excluded themselves from the classroom culture. Drew experienced this and explained, “we had a kid try to join us, but he was tossing chairs. The rest of the class was looking at him and making him stand out.” Based on the findings of this study, general education students accepted life skills students. However, if a student with a severe disability displayed unsafe behaviors in the classroom, it was inevitable that others would look. Any behaviors that were extreme and not typical of the rest of the students caused that student with a severe disability to stand out. Including life skills students was something that

participating teachers wanted and welcomed into their classrooms. However, when students displayed an unsafe behavior that was a major concern for teachers in this study. The safety and well-being of everyone in the classroom was the first priority for the participating teachers.

### **Inappropriate Behaviors Impeded the Learning of Students**

Teachers in this study experienced the benefits of the inclusion of life skills students. However, participating teachers did not want the inclusion of life skills students to divert or interfere with the learning in the general education classroom. A life skills student was included daily in Logan's general education classroom. Logan explained that when included students were "giving effort and doing everything they can do, I will pretty much bend over backwards. And I also feel frustrated when what they are doing or not doing impedes the rest of everyone else's learning." Alex emphasized the benefits of inclusion, but that inclusion must be set up properly so as not to disrupt the rest of the class:

A kiddo coming in to be included in a classroom can have many benefits. I also feel like kiddos in the classroom they are coming in to can hugely benefit with knowing how to deal with differences in people. Learning to have empathy toward others that learn in a different way. I think there have to be some guidelines set up so that it doesn't interfere with the learning of the majority of the kids that are involved.

Riley, a newer teacher to the building, wanted a life skills student to find social and behavioral success in the general education classroom. However, that particular life skills student had behavioral issues that disrupted the class. Riley expressed frustration with that included student because "I wish he could participate in more things but because he doesn't want to, he will act out. He's a sweet kid and a smart kid but he just can't be in the classroom for very long without being disruptive."

Drew had similar feelings. However, the student being included impacted the class in other ways. Drew answered that inclusion was not welcomed in the general education class “only when it becomes distracting or when other kids in the gen ed class might start even taking on those behaviors or mimicking [them].” Drew referenced an example of general education students acting differently, which caused a disruption in learning because of inclusion.

Participating teachers believed that including students with severe disabilities had its challenges because they had to differentiate and scaffold curriculum in order to meet the student’s individual needs. Casey explained that difference impacted the rest of the class’s learning, “there are also concerns about how their needs that are difficult to meet in a gen ed classroom can then deteriorate the potential learning happening for everyone else in the room.” Jamie added another level of concern regarding including life skills students and their impact on the learning of other students. Jamie revealed:

If I have to do a room clear or if I have to get that student out, then I am not teaching.

That is making the educational experience difficult for the other students and it’s making it very hard for our staff. Eventually, it’s going to make it where our staff is not willing to stay.

Teachers in this study had a responsibility to teach students grade level curriculum. They decided what methods and pedagogy would lead to academic and behavioral success for most students to learn grade level standards. If an included student was a distraction to that goal, a change was needed in the classroom.

### **Teachers Need More Time to Prepare Accommodations**

This study found that the larger and more diverse a classroom, the more time participating teachers needed to prepare lessons and instruction. More time equated to additional

time to work with students individually, the time to meet all accommodations, and time to differentiate for all students both with and without disabilities. The teachers in this study expressed that there were several issues regarding time that hindered success in an inclusive classroom. These teachers stated they were willing to do almost anything to meet the needs of any student, but the time that it took was overwhelming. Alex acknowledged that differentiating curriculum “wouldn’t [be] a problem as long as it is something that isn’t going to take a huge amount of time outside the school day.” Teachers in this study stated that more time would allow for additional success in an inclusive classroom.

**Teachers had difficulty meeting accommodations.** Riley, a newer teacher, was more than willing to accommodate students to meet their needs, especially when it came to assessments. When Riley was asked if you are willing to adapt grade level curriculum, Riley responded that being the only adult in the classroom and accommodating students was frustrating:

It can be frustrating when there is only one of me trying to provide those accommodations, like when I have a couple of students who need to have an assessment read aloud and I’m running back and forth, and you have 27 other kids who need your attention, too. The frustrating part is when you want to and have to provide these for the students, but you can’t always do it all the time easily.

When asked the same question, Tyler physically showed very strong feelings of passion and frustration. Tyler took time to accommodate for students that were included in the classroom but pondered if the time it took was worth it in the end and went on to share. Tyler implemented the use of QR (quick response) codes in the general education classroom. Any smart device that has a camera embedded within it can read a QR code. “QR codes are two-

dimensional barcodes which are small squares with black and white patterns and [are] used to encode some sort of information” (Cassavoy, 2017, para. 2). Tyler replied:

I’ve done it in the past where I have made a math test and I had kids that needed it read to them. But I couldn’t read it to them in the same setting. I did this app where I could record my voice reading the questions and then there was a QR code next to it that I pasted into the test and then the kids would use their iPad to do the QR code. They would listen through headphones and write on their paper. So it’s not like I’m lazy and I won’t because it was a lot of work for two kids in my class of 33.

Accommodating students is a necessity and it is their legal right (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The results from this study found that including students with severe disabilities in the classroom was important but with that teachers needed more time to accommodate for their needs.

**Teachers had difficulty differentiating lessons.** Teachers from this study also wanted and needed additional time to differentiate for all students. Differentiation was an expectation in each classroom. There were slight differences in opinion among the participants, of successful differentiation for students with severe disabilities between the study’s primary and intermediate teachers. Bobbie, a primary teacher, believed that if the curriculum was modified enough, any student can learn grade level curriculum, however, participating teachers just needed additional time. Bobbie shared, “I’m always willing; it’s just I need more time to do it. The time it takes to adapt lessons or differentiate them or the level of differentiation that’s needed takes an immense amount of time.” Jamie, who worked with all grade levels, had a slightly different perspective about including students who had much lower academic levels than their peers. Jamie explained that there were times when, depending on the skill or concept students learned, differentiation at

any grade level was possible. Jamie believed strongly that if students with severe disabilities worked with “grade level material that is so far above what they can actually do, [it] puts them farther behind. They are not backfilling and catching up. They are actually falling behind while their peers are going ahead.”

Logan, an intermediate teacher, shared similar feelings about the difficulty of meeting the needs of students who were academically multiple grade levels behind. Logan thought that the time it takes to meet those needs was nearly impossible for teachers. Logan similarly experienced that students who were multiple grade levels behind were “frustrated and that we’re going way too fast and unfortunately, we don’t have the time to go back to the skills that they need so they can get that foundation to then move forward.” Pat had an opinion similar to Logan’s regarding the difficulty of meeting the needs of students who were multiple grade levels behind. Pat stated, “in some ways, in some cases, on some days, for some kids, out of the room is going to give them the best bang for their mental buck.” Pat continued, “they will do better one on one. The one size fits all does not really apply. That’s why it’s called an IEP, that’s why that student has been identified as life skills.” Participating teachers all shared the same opinion about the difficulty of differentiating to meet all students’ needs. However, there was a slight difference in successful differentiation between primary and intermediate participating teachers.

**Class size has an impact on teacher engagement.** Participating teachers needed additional time to work with students individually or in small groups. When asked the question of how the district or school could better support you to meet the academic needs of all your students, Pat declared smaller class sizes would help. Several teachers in this study explained that large class sizes impacted the time they could work with students individually and in small groups. Pat stated that with a large class size of “32 personalities, 32 backgrounds, it’s

(inclusion) not one size fits all.” Pat continued that with that many students in a classroom, it was difficult to individually meet the needs of all students. When posed with the same question, Drew’s answer concurred with Pat’s and added that “more one-on-one time” was essential for success in the classroom. Jamie had similar opinions about the negative impact of larger class sizes. Jamie expressed that for teachers it was difficult to reach students, especially when they had a communication disorder. Jamie admitted that “it could be very specialized how you can talk to them. It’s hard as a teacher serving a lot of other kids with high classroom sizes to be able to even do that.” Teachers in this study believed that small class sizes would assist with meeting the needs of all students, especially if students with severe disabilities were included in the classroom.

Casey’s answers during the interview demonstrated that understanding how the included student reacted and felt in the classroom was paramount to successful inclusion. Casey had a son with a severe disability and experienced some arduous moments navigating through the public education process for inclusion. In Casey’s experience, students with severe disabilities needed additional repetitions. Therefore, Casey believed that in classrooms with a large number of students, it became even more difficult to meet all students’ needs. Casey’s frustration came from not having enough time in the classroom to meet all the different needs that arise from large class sizes. Casey also stated a concern for students with severe disabilities in a classroom with a high number of students. “We need to honor their need to do it over and over and not always keep moving faster. I feel worried for them [students with disabilities] because it’s just this moving train that doesn’t stop.” This study found that to have successful inclusion, teachers needed more time to work with students individually or in small groups to help those students that need additional repetitions while still meeting the needs of the rest of the class. If

participating teachers had additional time to differentiate lessons in smaller class sizes, they believed that could help find more success with inclusion in the classroom.

### **Inclusion Required a Specialized Skill Set for Teachers That Necessitated Additional Training**

Teachers in this study expressed that additional specialized training and professional development was necessary for a successful inclusive classroom. Many participating teachers wanted and needed further training since some students with severe disabilities had specialized needs that were different from what classroom teachers use daily. When participants were asked if they were willing to adapt their communication techniques to ensure that students with severe disabilities can be successfully included in their classroom, Jamie responded in an optimistic manner. Jamie worked with students who do not speak English so using visuals and other communication techniques was part of the daily routine in that classroom. Jamie added, “I think most teachers in our building would do everything they could, although we don’t all know sign language. That probably would really help if we all did.” At the school in this study, there were a few life skills students that could not verbally communicate their needs. Sign language was a form of communication that was extremely useful for all teachers, but specialized training was needed. Casey expressed frustration with the lack of training, although it was partially due to the added level of responsibility and training that was put upon general education teachers. Casey explained, “we have classroom teachers that are not special education teachers and yet we have special education teachers, so there must be a reason for them.” The results from this study found that if the level of training needed for a teacher to be a special education teacher was necessary, then additional specialized training was needed for general education teachers to find success with inclusive education.

**Teachers need specialized training.** Teachers in this study realized that with the growing practice of including students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom, many of them were not properly trained for specific students. Alex replied, “there needs to be some kind of training for me as a teacher. I don’t have the training for a student that would need different skills than the ones I am familiar with for my class of kids.” While completing the demographic survey, Drew noticed the last question and sighed. Drew realized and mentioned that personally more professional development was needed. Later in the interview, Drew again mentioned that it would help even knowing “strategies that work well for those [life skills] kiddos because that is something that is not known and I have to figure it out.” Drew suggested that even “front loading when you’re going to work with life skills students. Not just figuring out when you go.” Participating teachers stated that they were willing to work with life skills students but wanted to be better trained and prepared to meet the diverse needs of all their students.

Logan, who was also an intermediate teacher with experience with life skills students in the classroom claimed, “it is important for teachers to get training on how to deal with life skills [students] and us to get more training on what do we do if a kid has this blowup.” Logan’s frustrations showed through with rhetorical questions stated afterwards:

What do we do if we have a kid in our room that is two years behind who isn’t being pulled out? What would be some things that would be effective? Just giving us more strategies [is not enough], is there someone willing to coach us and help us?”

Bobbie also shared that there was a level of frustration “if I didn’t have the appropriate tools or I wasn’t prepared enough or I didn’t know them enough. Or I didn’t know what their abilities or disabilities were.” This study found that specialized training for teachers would teach

them how to work with specific disabilities and give the tools that assist students with severe disabilities to find success in the general education classroom.

### **Additional Qualified Assistants Were Needed in Increasingly Diverse Classrooms**

Teachers in this study wanted qualified assistants in their diverse classrooms. Qualified assistants were assistants that were formally educated, certified, or specifically trained to work with specific students with disabilities (BSD, 2015). Participating teachers expressed that having qualified assistants in the classroom helped them find success with inclusive education. Kelly noticed that over the past few years there had been a decrease in the allocation of assistants in all classrooms. Kelly explained, “they need more adults in the classroom to help and support students. I think it was better in the past.” This study found that if the expectation was to include students with severe disabilities in the classroom, supports were needed so the teacher and all students had social and academic success. Alex replied, “I would need more bodies. More people that could attend to those kids, bring those kids in, get them used to the setting in here.” Alex added, “I think that ensures success for me, for them, for the rest of the kids in the classroom.” Logan had concerns about the qualifications of assistants. Logan’s experience with assistants led to this statement, “I think a lot of assistants are afraid to interact with him because they might have a blow up or the assistants might not understand the grade level curriculum because they are hearing it for the first time.” Logan continued, “sometimes they’re the 31st kid in the room.” Results from this study found that qualified assistants make a difference in the classroom not only for the student with a disability but the teacher as well. The effect of that was that more students found success in the classroom.

Pat shared similar concerns about the lack of qualified assistants in the classroom, especially when unsafe behaviors occurred. Pat explained the difficulty for teachers when they

were the only adult in the classroom when a major behavioral issue occurred. Pat explained that, “you do have to stop the moment and whether it’s removing everybody and letting the child blow up, but now what did we teach the kids?” Continuing with a rhetorical question, Pat probed, “What did we teach the kid that is blowing out? I’m going to set off a bomb and everybody is going to leave and I’m going to get what I want.” Pat also became passionate and shared frustration about the lengthy process required for obtaining an emergency assistant, “don’t make it a gauntlet to run through all those things, there is a process that is almost designed to break you.” Teachers in this study agreed that inclusion had many benefits but with the increasing diversity both behaviorally and academically, a qualified or certified assistant was vital for success.

**Qualified assistants are needed in the classroom all day.** Teachers in this study believed that even in situations where there was a qualified assistant, that assistant was not there for the entire day. Pat expressed a frustration that there were aides that had limited time:

They are only a four-hour employee so they have to leave when they have to leave. That kid still needs support and often times logistically you put that adult with the kid in their greatest time of need, but that changes throughout the day. You end up with kids that hurt other kids and hurt adults and hurt themselves.

According to Pat, if assistants were in the classroom all day, it would decrease challenging behaviors and increase the safety for all students in the classroom. Jamie shared similar feelings about the lack of qualified assistants throughout the day. Again, for Jamie, the issue of safety was of great concern and the need for an assistant all day was something that the district could improve on. Jamie stated that without a qualified assistant, the teacher alone would need to make decisions and manage unsafe behaviors while trying to deliver instruction at the same time.

Jamie responded that when life skills students were with an assistant “I would take more of them and stay as long as they could. But when it’s only me, I can’t safely say that I have them because I would have to walk them back to their classroom.”

Casey shared concerns about the quality of assistants that spend the entire work day in a classroom. Casey found that when several life skills students were included in a classroom, oftentimes multiple assistants were also in the classroom with those students. Casey described that, “one of the biggest things we need is training for our staff who comes in to assist our inclusion. We shouldn’t have assistants for inclusion until they have gone through some type of training.” Casey expressed strongly that assistants needed proper training. Training assistants so they are qualified to work with students with severe disabilities is essential for successful inclusion. Results from this study found that qualified assistants who were in the classroom all day was beneficial not only for the student they assisted, but the rest of the classroom. When teachers in this study had safety concerns for the class, a well-trained assistant helped with the behavioral and academic challenges that inclusion inevitably brought.

Tyler had success with a qualified assistant that spent nearly the entire day in the classroom. This qualified assistant had a science degree and attended several trainings for students with disabilities. Tyler had concerns about the district retaining quality assistants. Tyler stated that qualified assistants helped the classroom function, but oftentimes it was difficult to retain qualified assistants:

There are classrooms with way more kids, with more IEPs and no additional support staff in there. It’s about people who are qualified, people who are invested, people who are paid well enough who want to stick around when whatever garbage comes around. It’s about people, staffing; money is what it comes down to because you have to be willing to

pay people what they are worth. When you don't pay people what they are worth they do see their value. It may not be the message that the district means to send, but you can't expect a bunch of work from people who could make more money slinging drinks at Starbucks.

This study found that inclusion created more academic and behavioral diversity within a classroom. Participating teachers needed qualified assistants to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Those qualified assistants helped create a successful inclusive classroom.

### **Artifacts**

Artifacts were used in this study to assist with triangulation. Artifacts are any type of object or instrument that is used by participants (Merriam, 1998). All teachers in the study were asked to share artifacts that impacted their experience with inclusion. Two participating teachers shared artifacts that included iPads, a speaker system, and the classroom furniture. With the increased use of technology and assistive technology in classrooms, teachers in this study also implemented a variety of technological tools to deliver instruction and assess students' knowledge. Some participating teachers described that with the increased use of iPads and Chromebooks that students with a reading disability that had any text read to them, or students with a writing disability used a speech-to-text feature to write. Tyler used iPads to deliver math assessments to students that had a reading disability. Tyler made a vocal recording of the questions through an app that created a QR code. Students with an iPad took a picture of the QR code and then the math question was read to them. Using iPads met the needs of those students. However, Tyler acknowledged that the time and effort required to create the QR codes was overwhelming. Tyler admitted "it's not like I'm lazy and I won't because it was a lot of work for two kids in my class of 33." The use of technology in the classrooms was useful to meet the

needs of students. However, Tyler added that being the only adult preparing accommodations for curriculum and assessments was time-consuming.

Riley thought additional training with equipment, such as technological tools that helped students with severe disabilities was essential for success. An artifact that Riley showed was a cart of iPads that were in the classroom. Riley acknowledged, “we have iPads, but I don’t really have the time to use them or exactly know how to use them and there is not a lot of training for that.” Riley admitted that when it came to assistive technology that sometimes “you are using your own tools, but it doesn’t always work, and you don’t know if you should be doing that.” Participating teachers believed that iPads were a useful tool not only for students with disabilities but all students, to increase engagement, creativity, and safe use of assistive technology.

When asked when are you willing to modify the physical environment in your classroom to include students with a severe disability, Riley looked around, pointed to the odd shaped classroom configuration and stated, “the ability to do that in your classroom in general is hard because of their shape and their furniture.” The physical space of a classroom and the built-in features inside posed a problem for teachers in this school since they do not have the ability to rearrange or move those features such as walls, doors, or built-in cabinetry. However, as Riley added soon afterwards, there was a legal responsibility for the teacher and the school to meet any students’ need.

Another artifact that Tyler shared was a speaker system in the classroom that needed to be used daily for a student with a disability. Before the school year started, Tyler was trained in the use of the speaker system. This speaker system helped a student properly hear instruction in the classroom. At the end of the year, the system was removed because it was a piece of equipment that followed that student. Tyler explained that the training was not difficult and that

it “goes along with what we do with our lesson plans.” Systems such as the one Tyler used was not terribly different from other speaker systems teachers in this school had access to in the past. As beneficial as this was, at times teachers in this study responded that with almost an endless number of apps or resources, it became overwhelming learning and being trained on available resources. A few teachers in this study described how they used assistive technology to assist with inclusion but pondered if it was worth the time to prepare for only a small handful of students. Participating teachers were more than willing to include students with severe disabilities in their classroom and meet their needs in any way possible. Two teachers who were interviewed shared artifacts that assisted with their explanation of their attitude toward inclusive education.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how life skills students impact elementary teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education. The primary question of this qualitative case study was to understand how including life skills students impacts teachers’ views on inclusive education. A secondary question of how teachers describe successful supports and resources that assists them to have a successful inclusive classroom was answered with the data. In general, teachers in this study found many positive aspects to including life skills students in the general education classroom. Teachers in this study affirmed that having a primary and an intermediate life skills program also enhanced the school community. With some extra supports, teachers in this study believed that all classrooms would find success with inclusive education. Through individual semistructured interviews, demographic surveys, and artifacts, six themes were discovered in answer to the two research questions. Those themes were: (a) benefits of inclusion outweighed negative impact, (b) disruptive behavior impacted

classroom dynamic, (c) inappropriate behaviors impeded the learning of students, (d) teachers need more time to prepare accommodations, (e) inclusion required a specialized skill set for teachers that necessitated additional training, and (f) additional qualified assistants were needed in increasingly diverse classrooms. Although participating teachers described many benefits to inclusion, they also described several shared supports and resources needed to assist with creating a successful inclusive classroom.

This study found that the behavior issues that some life skills students had impeded the learning of not only that student, but the rest of the students. Teachers, according to this study's participants, were more than willing to have students with severe disabilities included in their classrooms. However, participating teachers needed more time and further specific training to be best prepared to work with students with specific needs. Participating teachers stated numerous times that creating a safe environment for all students both with and without a disability was of the utmost importance. With growing class sizes in general education classrooms, having qualified or certified assistants to help with differentiation or behavioral issues a student with a severe disability may have is needed (Cambridge-Johnson, 2014).

The following chapter includes an explanation of the results to related literature, limitations, and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This qualitative single case study investigated how life skills students impacted elementary general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The researcher used a qualitative methodology because it “empower[ed] individuals to share their stories . . . and minimize[ed] the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participant in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). This was a single case study because the school and its 10 participating teachers were the boundary of that singular unit (Creswell, 2013). Semistructured interviews allowed the interviews to be focused yet provided participants with the ability to share openly about their experiences. Along with a demographic survey and artifacts shared by two participating teachers, six themes were discovered after analyzing the data. Overall, teachers in this study held a positive attitude toward the inclusion of all students with disabilities in their classroom. They sought and encouraged inclusion and understood its importance. This positively corresponds to the current literature regarding teacher attitude toward inclusion (Alquraini, 2012; Chiner & Cardona, 2013, Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Southern, 2010).

In this chapter, a summary and discussion of the results are presented. A discussion of the results in relation to the literature, the study's limitations, and the implication of the results for practice follow. Several recommendations for further research are discussed, accompanied by a conclusion.

### **Summary of the Results**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how life skills students impact general education elementary teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. After analyzing the data, demographic survey, and artifacts this study found that in general,

participating teachers recounted many positive aspects to including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Teachers in this study also acknowledged that including students with severe disabilities assisted with not only socialization, but normalization for all students. Bobbie, a participant in this study, explained when a life skills student was in the general education classroom, students in the class “loved it. They knew he was different. I think they were really compassionate about that. For them it was a great social lesson.” Pat recognized that the inclusion of life skills students in the general education classroom provided “a microcosm of the real world.” Teachers in this study declared that inclusion created a school community of tolerance and acceptance.

However, teachers in this study expressed concerns that occurred with inclusion. In general, inclusion created additional responsibilities for participating teachers. That added responsibility equated to teachers spending more time to prepare for inclusion. Pat described that teaching “should not be a 12-hour job just to be successful.” Pat continued, “I can barely go home and give my own two kids the time that they need because [I have to] plan this lesson five different ways for five different groups because that’s just what we have.” Furthermore, teachers in this study required more time to have a successful inclusive classroom. Participating teachers also expressed that if there were properly trained or certified assistants in their classrooms, that would help with the growing responsibilities that came with inclusive education. Tyler thought that if a qualified assistant was in the classroom there “could be social integration of all levels. But when it comes to academics, we could do levels and groups and integration at certain levels.” Results from this study found that teachers believed that all students deserved an opportunity to be with their peers in the general education classroom. However, extra supports such as additional time to accommodate students with severe disabilities and the use of qualified

assistants trained to work with specific students was essential to maintaining a successful inclusive classroom.

Following a thorough analysis of collected research data six emergent themes were identified. Using open coding, the researcher read through the participants' interviews one at a time. Phrases that frequently appeared throughout each interview were highlighted. Each interview was individually read through three times. During the second round, the researcher compared the highlighted phrases from each of the transcripts. For example, in one transcript, any phrases that alluded to "impeding learning" were highlighted blue. During the second round, the researcher looked for all phrases in the other transcripts that alluded to "impeding learning" and highlighted them blue. The researcher also indicated how many times that phrase appeared in each transcript. Initially 36 codes from all interviews were created. From those 36 codes, 20 categories were created. Those 20 categories contained overlapping or similar underlying themes. Finally, six themes and subthemes emerged as a result of condensing the similar categories. The six themes were: (a) benefits of inclusion outweighed negative impact, (b) disruptive behavior impacted classroom dynamic, (c) inappropriate behaviors impeded the learning of students, (d) teachers need more time to prepare accommodations, (e) inclusion required a specialized skill set for teachers that necessitated additional training, and (f) additional qualified assistants were needed in increasingly diverse classrooms.

### **Discussion of the Results**

Two main research questions guided this study:

1. How do the inclusion of life skills students (students with severe disabilities) impact teachers' views on inclusive education?

- a. How do (primary, intermediate, and specialist) teachers describe their attitude of, and experience with, inclusive education?
2. How do elementary teachers describe successful supports and resources that enable them to successfully practice inclusive education in a school that includes life skills students in the general education classroom?

To answer each question, all interviews were coded and analyzed. Participants also completed a demographic survey and shared artifacts from their respective classrooms. The combination of interviews, demographic surveys, and artifacts led to the six themes. The following are the findings from the study.

**Finding #1: The inclusion of life skills students should be practiced regularly**

Results from this study found that including life skills students had a positive impact on teacher attitude toward inclusive education and should be practiced regularly. Participating teachers stated they believed in the positive, long-term benefits of including life skills students in the general education classroom and wanted to include students as often as possible. Teachers in the study expressed that the inclusion of life skills students encouraged the socialization of those same students, and it also provided opportunities for general education students to learn of others' differences in a safe environment. Therefore, including life skills students in general education classrooms should be practiced regularly.

**Regularly including life skills students had numerous social benefits for all students.**

One of the teachers in this study spoke of the multiple social benefits. Riley was pleasantly surprised with the inclusion of a life skills student in the general education classroom. Riley observed that inclusion of a life skills student was an “interesting thing for me [because of] how adjusted [general education students] are to different behaviors. We will talk about social

situations and I'll say, oh this student, and they are trying to connect to how people are different." Riley continued that inclusion was "really showing the differences, but also pointing out the positive qualities." Earlier in the interview, it was mentioned that Riley wanted the life skills student who attended the general education classroom to be included longer and more often.

Swain et al. (2012) found that "inclusion is an effective way to improve socialization and peer relationships for students with and without disabilities" (p. 79). Many participating teachers thought that the inclusion of life skills students should occur on a regular basis, so students begin to feel comfortable around one another and support each other. This idea is similar to Swain et al.'s (2012) findings that inclusion assists with all students learning about their differences and accepting each other. Several teachers interviewed in the study also mentioned the importance of a life skills classroom in the school because it built a diverse school culture. Tyler believed that the inclusion of life skills students built "that social community with all members of our school." Teachers in this study believed including life skills students reduced any fear, anxiety, and ignorance of general education students toward students with severe disabilities. Because of the numerous benefits of including life skills students, participating teachers' views of inclusion remained positive and they encouraged the inclusion of life skills students regularly.

**Inclusion created an opportunity for general education students to be positive role models.** There is another benefit that participating teachers observed with regularly including students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom. That benefit is that it provided opportunities for general education students to be positive role models when they might not have had that opportunity in a school without one. This was another reason why teachers had a positive attitude toward the inclusion of life skills students. Carter et al. (2016) found that

including students with severe disabilities provided opportunities for positive relationships among general education students and students with severe disabilities. When students with severe disabilities were paired with general education students there were “increases in the interactions, the numbers of different classmates with whom they conversed, and the extent to which they made progress on social-related goals” (Carter et al., 2016, p. 226). In this study, Drew observed general education students being positive role models “during specials, recess, when they joined us on field trips. Last year it really helped point out certain leaders.”

Participating teachers described incidents in which general education students who struggled with their behavior in the classroom changed and showed more positive behaviors once a life skills student was present. Logan described that when a life skills student was in the classroom, several of the general education students loved “being responsible because [they] had a job. It’s called the host and that job is very coveted.” The results from this study showed that those general education students realized they were looked at as an example and wanted to be a positive role model. Having a life skills classroom in the school also provided other opportunities for general education students to assist with life skills students in adaptive P.E. and adaptive music. Including life skills students built a strong school community where students helped one another, and participating teachers declared that was an invaluable experience for all involved. Teachers in this study expressed that a life skills program in the school was beneficial for the school community and it had a positive impact on their attitude toward inclusive education.

## **Finding #2: The Inclusion of Students With Severe Disabilities Should Be Considered on an Individual Basis**

Participating teachers in this study wanted inclusion to occur on a regular basis because they experienced many positive benefits. However, the inclusion of students with severe disabilities should be considered and implemented on an individual basis, not on a school-wide or program-wide basis.

Students with severe disabilities are placed on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for a specific disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). IEPs are individually created to help that particular student meet certain education or behavioral goals. Jones and Hensley (2012) found that it is essential to have a plan and review when students have the opportunity to be included with general education students. When assessing if students with severe disabilities should be included in the general education classroom, their individual needs and goals should be a priority (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). When asked when a life skills student should be taught in a special education classroom and not a general education classroom, Casey explained that many times educators “often don’t consider if putting them into a gen ed classroom makes them feel better and allows them to access learning.” Casey continued that educators needed to think about each life skills student individually, to “look toward their future, and do their learning needs match what we are doing in a gen ed classroom or do they need to be in a different path based on what their life-long path is going to be.”

Pat also expressed strongly about ensuring that life skills students were included on an individual basis. Pat explained that “life skills students have just as much potential to grow and they have as much right if not more to be successful.” However, Pat stated that including life skills students in the general education classroom “has to work for both [the student and the

general education classroom environment]. It has to work for what the child is ready for or just outside of what they are ready for so they can stretch toward that.” Students with severe disabilities have different needs that need to be met, and educators need to do what is best for that individual student to find success in school (Smagorinsky, 2014). Teachers in this study believed that including life skills students that are not mentally, socially, or behaviorally ready for the general education classroom can potentially damage future success for that student as well as the positive attitude that participating teachers had toward inclusion.

### **Finding #3: Successful Inclusion of Life Skills Students Was Highly Dependent on the Right Supports and Resources for That Individual Student**

Teachers from this study had experiences that ranged from positive to several negative ones. Participating teachers found numerous benefits when including life skills students, but there were several issues that arose through experiences with including life skills students in the general education classroom. Participating teachers thought that those negative experiences could be remedied with the right supports and resources based on each student’s needs. Teachers in this study believed that both the teacher and the student being included could find additional success with the right support based on that student’s needs.

**A lack of support and resources often led to disruptive and inappropriate behavior from the included student.** Studies (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014, Downing, 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Rajovic & Jovanovic, 2013) found that teachers need and expect their districts to support them with resources that will help all students find success in an inclusive classroom. Teachers in this study described how disruptive behaviors impacted the classroom culture. Some students with severe disabilities did not exhibit the same social and behavioral skills as general education students. Therefore, they had difficulties regulating their emotions

when situations became difficult. Kelly explained that there were times when a few life skills students were in the classroom and “it’s really hard for them to have to sit and listen to things that are over their heads. It’s unfair to them.” Kelly continued that at that point they “can’t manage their emotions and they’re violent.” Even though Kelly experienced violence (i.e., prolonged screaming and furniture throwing) in the classroom, Kelly still believed in the benefits of inclusion.

Several participating teachers had encountered experiences similar to Kelly’s. Many teachers in this study described they would do anything that they could for any student that was in their classroom. However, they did not want students who posed a physical or mental threat to other students in the classroom. Alex expressed concern for including life skills students if “there was a chance that something could set them off or could make them have a behavior that would be harmful to them or to others in the class.” Many of the participating teachers described that keeping students safe in their classroom was a top priority. Teachers in this study experienced students with severe disabilities throwing chairs or other objects in the classroom. Pat shared that “the kid that is throwing chairs and breaking things and crawling under the table” needed support. This was a physical safety concern, but it also impacted students’ mental safety. One teacher interviewed explained that when this type of unsafe behavior occurred in a classroom it led to long-lasting negative results in other students. Jamie experienced violent behaviors in the classroom and proclaimed that “safety is really important to me and keeping the students safe” was a priority. Participating teachers strongly believed in the benefits of inclusion. However, students cannot learn in an environment where they feel in danger physically or mentally (Dursley & Betts, 2015). Participating teachers believed that with

additional supports for the included student, their behavior might not have reached the point of being unsafe in the classroom.

Teachers in this study also described how other inappropriate behaviors such as screaming or running out of classrooms from students with severe disabilities negatively impacted the learning of general education students. Participants explained that, in general, general education students were resilient and forgiving of one another. However, when a student who was included displayed inappropriate behaviors that took away from the learning of the rest of the class, teachers in this study found it more difficult to encourage inclusion. Several participating teachers described their experiences with life skills students in their classroom who infringed upon or interfered with the learning opportunities of others. Logan stated that when a life skills student's "learning challenges or behavior challenges impacts the general education students that they need to be placed [in a different setting] for their own benefit, their self-esteem, their learning." Teachers in this study wanted life skills students to remain in the classroom more often and longer, but described that disruptive behaviors, such as acting out, blowing up, and other students mimicking those disruptive behaviors became extremely challenging. Participating teachers described that when they had to address and deal with those disruptive behaviors multiple times throughout a day, it took them away from instructional time. With the correct supports participating teachers expressed they could focus upon instruction, not on extreme negative behaviors in the classroom.

**Teachers needed qualified assistants who are trained to meet specific students' needs to find success in an inclusive classroom.** Including students with disabilities in the classroom lent itself to a wider range of intellectual and behavioral needs. However, those assistants need to be qualified and trained to meet the specific needs of included students.

Glazzard (2011) found that properly trained assistants are essential for the success of the included student. Even when there is an assistant who works one-on-one with a student, that assistant needs to know when to step back because having an adult “next to them all the time . . . set[s] them apart from all of the others” (p. 58). Many times, teachers in this study explained that there were assistants that helped life skills students in the classroom. Having another adult in the classroom had the potential to be extremely useful. However, what teachers in this study claimed was that to have a successful inclusive classroom, highly qualified or certified assistants was essential. Several participating teachers described negative experiences with assistants. A few teachers in this study shared that having an unqualified assistant in the classroom makes it even harder for them to do their job. Casey reminisced about a time when a few life skills students were included in the classroom. Casey was frustrated because there were “more adults that are talking all the time and aren’t realizing that they need to tone down their needs to be involved.” Having an assistant in the classroom should benefit the student as well as the teacher.

Several participating teachers wanted life skills students to attend their classroom more often with a qualified assistant. Glazzard (2012) stated similarly that “effective inclusion depends on the availability of support in the classroom and to the importance of classroom support for supporting children with behavioral difficulties” (p. 57). Alex explained that the school was “a better community when they [life skills students] are in our building with qualified instructional leaders.” Qualified assistants that were trained to meet the needs of a particular student with a disability had benefits for both the student and the school community (Monsen et al., 2014). Logan wanted more inclusion of life skills students but recognized that “it’s also a lack of assistants. They [life skills teachers] would send more students if they had the assistant manpower.” Jamie had a comparable feeling about wanting more life skills students included in

the classroom. Jamie was open and encouraged life skills students to come into the classroom even if it was only “five minutes.” However, Jamie acknowledged that a lack of qualified assistants meant that “I can’t safely say that I have them because I would have to walk them back to their classroom.” Teachers in this study explained that to have successful inclusion, a qualified assistant that can meet that individual student’s academic and behavioral needs was essential.

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

There were two overarching connections between this study and the literature of teacher attitude toward inclusion (Alquraini, 2012; Chiner & Cardona, 2013, Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Southern, 2010). Those two connections were that teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusion (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009) and teachers needed more time and qualified assistants (Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). Similar to the current literature regarding supports needed for inclusion (Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016), additional supports and resources, such as more time and additional qualified assistants were needed for students with severe disabilities. The findings from this study about the impact of including students with severe disabilities on teacher attitude toward inclusion added to the literature regarding students with severe disabilities (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Southern, 2010). This study found a conclusion different from other studies that investigated teacher attitude toward students with severe disabilities where teachers tended to have a negative attitude toward inclusion (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Southern, 2010). The teachers in this study tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusion of students with severe disabilities.

Many participating teachers also stated they encouraged more inclusion with the correct supports.

All of the teachers in this study tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusion. This result was similar to the current literature (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ross-Hill, 2009). McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013) stated that elementary teachers “believed that inclusion included the celebration of strengths, as well as meeting individual needs” (p. 212). Teachers in this study also spoke about the benefits of inclusion that included building a more diverse school community, in addition to providing an environment where students learned about physical, emotional, and intellectual differences. Tyler explained that inclusion “definitely benefits our students.” Alex had similar feelings and expressed that, “I also feel like kiddos in the classroom that are coming in can hugely benefit with knowing how to deal with differences in people.” McGhie-Richmond (2013) found that elementary teachers tended to focus on the whole child instead of just the academic success of that child. Similarly, teachers in this study focused on the long-term benefits of inclusion on all students, not just in schools but outside of schools. Alex experienced that inclusion created opportunities in which students learned “to have empathy toward others that learn in a different way.” This was a long-term benefit of inclusion (Jones & Hensley, 2012). Although there were difficulties for participating teachers regarding inclusive education, teachers in both this study and in the literature tended to have a positive attitude toward inclusive education.

This study differed from the literature (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001) in that it found teachers tended to have a positive attitude toward including students with severe disabilities. The literature stated that teachers tend to have a less than positive attitude toward working with students with severe disabilities (Alquraini, 2012). Students with severe disabilities inherently

required additional attention, support, and/or modification (Southern, 2010). This translated to more work and effort for the teacher. Alquraini's (2012) study had similar results and stated that because of the added work for teachers, they "tended to be less accepting of working with students with severe intellectual disabilities in their general classroom" (p. 177). Cook (2001) also found that teachers had stronger feelings of indifference toward students with severe disabilities. Logan remembered that the life skills teacher explained that a specific life skills student who was included in the general education classroom for "15 minutes is worth more than half a day in [the life skills] room. I really try to include them." With the right supports, participating teachers in this study encouraged the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom. Alex idealized that "a full-time aide with each one [life skills students] of them [would] ensure success for me, for them, for the rest of the kids in the classroom." This research study provided another perspective to add to the current literature regarding the effect of the inclusion of students with severe disabilities on teachers' attitudes.

This study contributed yet another collection of voices which will strengthen the current literature, which advocates that teachers need more time to prepare and accommodate for included students (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2007; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). Teachers in this study described that with inclusion, additional time was needed to meet the needs of all students. Likewise, Cook et al. (2007) found that teachers may not have the time to provide all essential adaptations and accommodations in an inclusive classroom. Participating teachers needed additional time to prepare and deliver instruction, in addition to working with all students in a more diverse classroom setting. The current literature found that teachers had concerns about inclusion and the additional workload and loss of personal time outside of the school day (McGhie-Richmond

et al., 2013; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). Participating teachers wanted and encouraged inclusion. However, the increased workload both during and outside of school makes it more difficult for teachers to have a successful inclusive classroom.

Another resource that teachers needed for a successful inclusive classroom was a qualified assistant—an adult who was formally educated, trained, or certified to work with a specific student with a disability. Teachers in this study described that having a qualified assistant and not simply a person in the classroom supported teachers immensely. In the current literature, teachers sought highly trained and qualified classroom assistants who could work together with them as a team (Glazzard, 2001). Glazzard (2001) stated that teachers “stressed that effective inclusion depends on the availability of support in the classroom . . . and referred to the importance of classroom support for supporting children with behavioral difficulties” (p. 59). A qualified classroom assistant could have remedied that situation (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). Similarly, teachers in this study preferred not to have an assistant if they were not qualified to work with that particular student, because it makes their job more difficult. Logan recounted a few experiences with assistants in which “they have learning challenges themselves. I’m explaining and sometimes they’re just the 31st kid in the room.” Bobbie had a concern about assistants in the classroom who were not qualified. Bobbie ideally wanted an assistant who “knows that student [and could possibly] teach other students.” A successful inclusive classroom is also dependent on the availability and quality of an assistant (Glazzard, 2012). Tyler had a qualified assistant and explained that “she has a degree in chemistry. She doesn’t have a degree in education, but she is a problem solver.” Teachers in this study claimed that qualified assistants were key for the students to find success in an inclusive classroom.

Teachers in this study affirmed that they were willing to go to great lengths to create a successful inclusive classroom, ranging from professional development to specific technological training. What many participating teachers revealed was that they were not equipped to work with students with severe disabilities. Logan responded, “I would do anything as long as I know what I need to be doing.” Teachers in this study shared that they were more than willing to attend a training, especially if it was specialized for the student that was in their classroom. The literature concurs with this finding in that most teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusive education but believed that they were not adequately trained (Ko & Boswell, 2013). Teachers in this study and in the literature found that teachers in these studies wanted further training so they were prepared to meet all students’ needs.

The findings from this study also had connections to the theoretical framework of this study, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB formulates that there are three interlinked variables: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, forming a behavioral intention that can predict certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). When individuals have a positive attitude and subjective norm, and confidence in their perceived control, they are more likely to perform a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, many of the participating teachers had a positive attitude toward inclusion and encouraged the inclusion of life skills students in their classrooms. The school in which the study took place had a culture of including life skills students. That school culture of including life skills students in general education classrooms provided a positive subjective norm or the “perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). The perceived behavioral control that teachers had in this study was somewhat limited. Teachers in this study declared that there was a lack of support and resources but expressed that there was support from their colleagues. Despite the

fact that teachers tended to have a negative perception of their behavioral control, the three variables together still produced a positive behavioral intention in participating teachers that led to performing the behavior of including life skills students in the general education classroom.

This study's conceptual framework revolves around general education teacher attitude toward inclusive education regarding students with severe disabilities. This also included understanding teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, because teachers are one of the most crucial factors in a student's educational success (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). As more schools are including students with severe disabilities in the general education classroom, it is vital to understand how to prepare teachers to be successful in meeting all students' needs (Cambridge-Johnson et al., 2014). The teachers in this study worked in a school that had a life skills classroom and practiced inclusion, which adds to the literature of how including students with severe disabilities impacts teacher attitude. Participating teachers held a positive attitude toward inclusion, and they also worked in a school where the norm was to include life skills students. Those two variables, including support from colleagues created behaviors where teachers in this study encouraged the inclusion of life skills students in the classroom.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited because it was a qualitative single case study and not generalizable to other schools or districts. Yin (2003) stated that the results from "case studies are not generalizable to populations, and that their purpose is to expand and generalize theories" (p.10). In addition to Yin's (2003) findings, many qualitative studies that used fewer than 20 participants limited the external validity or a study's power to generalize its findings (Adams, 2015). This study focused on one specific group of 10 teachers in one particular school. Therefore, generalizing the findings was not critical (Creswell, 2013). There were three other

schools in the same district that had a life skills program, but the results cannot be generalized because the school culture and experiences that teachers in this study had was inherently unique.

Another limitation was the specialist's experience with life skills students. That specialist did not have a classroom where large groups of students met daily. This specialist had very limited experience with life skills students because of the position held. However, this specialist had interactions with life skills students several years ago although it was in the life skills classroom, not in the general education classroom. Even with these limitations, the specialist was still able to speak about the culture toward inclusion and the changes that occurred at the school.

The study was also limited to the shared experiences and the time participants were interviewed. Because the researcher worked with five of the participants for more than five years, there were numerous previous conversations about inclusion and its effects on attitude. Since the interviews took place during one point in time, the participants' attitude and perspective may have changed, depending on the students included and assistance given in the classroom from year to year. The attitudes of participants may be slightly different depending on the time of the school year. There was a pattern of attitude that teachers tended to follow throughout the year which started with anticipation, then survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and ended with anticipation again (Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 2005). All interviews were conducted toward the end of the school year which may have had a slightly different outcome than if participants were interviewed at a different time of the year.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice**

The results from this study showed that participants wanted and encouraged the inclusion of life skills students in their classrooms. Inclusionary practices at the school created a culture of

tolerance and acceptance that students may not have experienced elsewhere. Casey explained that inclusion created “tolerance, flexibility [and] empathy. I think the modeling and being around kids that are developing in a more typical manner [is beneficial]. They can be around those kiddos also.” Despite the problems and shortcomings of inclusion, teachers in this study expressed that they will do anything possible to meet the legal and social needs of all their students to make their inclusive classroom successful.

### **Importance of School Culture**

The teachers in the study possessed a variety of experiences both within their teaching career as well as working with life skills students. A consistent theme from all participants was the encouragement of inclusion practices in their classrooms. The school had an intermediate (fourth through six grade) life skills program when it first opened, which established a school culture of inclusionary practices. As staff changed and a primary life skills classroom was added, the school culture of practicing inclusion in the general education classrooms remained consistent. Over the past six years, the school transitioned through several principals, but the culture of inclusion that the school maintained did not waiver. This finding also aligned with Ahmed and Ishwar’s (2007) findings that principals’ expectations were not a significant factor in teachers implementing inclusion. Bobbie, a primary teacher and newer to the school stated that the inclusion of life skills students created “a better community when they are in our building. I think everybody benefits.” The school culture of inclusion was ingrained in all new staff and students. The unchanging school culture is related to one of TPB’s variables, subjective norms. The subjective norm of this study was the school culture toward inclusion. What this study found was a positive norm or culture surrounding the inclusion of life skills students. Results

from this study showed that teachers believed including life skills students created a stronger, more inclusive school community.

### **One Size Does not Fit All**

Teachers in this study believed that including life skills students in the general education classroom had positive results, long-term benefits, and they wanted inclusion to occur as often as possible. However, teachers in this study agreed that including students with disabilities in the general education classroom should be looked at on an individual basis. Casey declared that when it comes to inclusion the adults involved needed to figure out “how it works for humans, not how it looks on paper. Thinking about class size, looking at the needs of kids coming into each room. Is it feasible that the teacher can meet those needs?” Any life skills student that had stakeholders who wanted them to join a general education classroom had the opportunity to join a grade level classroom. However, if the student being included showed unsafe behaviors that harmed that student or others in the classroom a different plan needed to be put into place because of the negative impact on the students (Dursley & Betts, 2015). Jones and Hensley (2012) stated that it is imperative that students with severe disabilities are provided the opportunity to learn from general education peers as long as that inclusion is not a distraction to the academic education of others. They continued that there are other times throughout a school day where students can interact with one another. Just because a certain inclusion plan worked for one student with a severe disability does not mean it will work for another (Smagorinsky, 2014). To have successful inclusion, participating teachers believed that each student that was included needed to be looked at on an individual basis.

Teachers in this study clearly described their experiences regarding the inclusion of life skills students in their classrooms. They consistently acknowledged that this was a practice that

should continue. This aligns with this study's theoretical framework. The TPB states that three interlinked variables can predict a person's behavior. This study found that two of the variables were positive and the third had some limited aspects. Together the teachers in this study had a positive attitude toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities. The district where the school that the study took place in served thousands of students and it was essential that all students, especially those who had severe disabilities who were being included in the general education classroom were viewed as individuals and their specific needs were met. Forcing students with severe disabilities into the classroom to simply state that inclusion occurred in the school was detrimental not only for that student but others as well.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Through this qualitative case study, several themes emerged from the study of how life skills students impacted elementary teachers' attitude toward inclusive education. There were several recommendations for further research. The study should be replicated in one of the other elementary schools that had a life skills program. The study should also be replicated in a school within the same district that was similar in size and socioeconomic status but without a life skills classroom, and lastly a study on the impact of school culture on teacher attitude toward inclusion.

#### **Recommendation #1: Replicate the Study in Another Elementary School That has a Life Skills Program**

Qualitative case studies cannot be generalized to other populations (Yin, 2003). Since this study was not generalizable, and there were three other elementary schools with a life skills program in the same district, it would be beneficial for the district and educational leaders to compare the four schools. If teachers from all four schools shared their experiences, and there

were comparable themes to this study, it would strengthen the need for additional supports and resources for teachers in the district. Not only will it provide further evidence for district leaders, but it will expand research regarding the impact of students with severe disabilities on teacher attitude toward inclusion.

**Recommendation #2: Replicate the Study in an Elementary School That Is Similar in Size and Socioeconomic Status but Without a Life Skills Classroom**

There were 26 elementary schools in the district and only four of those schools had a life skills classroom. As stated earlier, case studies cannot be generalized (Yin, 2003) and because this study focused on life skills students, surveying teachers from other schools about the impact of including students with disabilities on teachers' attitude toward inclusion is useful for district leaders. Additionally, this study found that teachers wanted inclusion to occur on a regular basis. It would be beneficial to study if other schools without a life skills classroom share similar opinions and feelings toward inclusion. All schools in the district were working toward additional inclusionary practices. If the district wants successful inclusion, it is essential to understand how teachers across the district feel, their attitudes toward inclusion, and the supports they need.

**Recommendation #3: Study the Impact of School Culture on Teacher Attitude Toward Inclusion**

The results from this study led to a question about school culture. Each school has its unique culture. That culture may impact the attitude of its teachers. The results from Townsend's (2009) study led to a statement that because the study occurred in a rural area, the unexpected outcome was based on the culture of the school. Surveying teachers about their attitude toward their school culture is also important for district leaders. If there is a positive

school culture toward inclusion, what impact does it have on teacher attitude? Investigating if there is a correlation between school culture and teacher attitude would deepen the research of inclusion.

### **Recommendation for Action**

Teachers in this study believed that having a life skills program in their school had numerous benefits for both the life skills students and general education students. Participating teachers acknowledged that a having a life skills program in the school provided opportunities for general education students to learn with students with severe disabilities, and even be role models for them. Teachers in this study described general education students building tolerance and showing empathy toward students with severe disabilities. For that reason, providing opportunities for life skills students to be in their home school should be examined.

### **Recommendation: Examine the Decentralization of the Life Skills Program**

The district involved in this study is arranged in such a way that there are 26 elementary schools, divided into four feeder groups, with each feeder group going to a different high school. Each feeder group has one elementary school that has a life skills program. Therefore, if a life skills student lives outside the school boundary of one of the four schools with a life skills program, they are transported to a different elementary school.

Decentralizing the life skills program would enable life skills students who are transferred to stay at their home school. Students with severe disabilities are at an “increased risk of social rejection and isolation [and] fewer friends than children with mild disabilities” (Ferreira et al., 2017). If life skills students stay at their home elementary school, it would provide opportunities for both teachers and general education students to experience and learn with a student with a severe disability. Other opportunities would include general education

students knowing and learning about a child with a severe disability that may live on their street, but never had the opportunity to meet because that child attended a different school. According to the findings of this study, including life skills students in the school provided many social benefits and created a more inclusive school culture.

Decentralizing a life skills program may prove to be ambitious and costly. The researcher had minimal budgetary knowledge. Even with minimal budgetary knowledge, it is stated that life skills classrooms have a lower student to teacher ratio (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, decentralizing the program, where students are at multiple schools instead of just one, may be costlier because additional teachers and staff may need to be hired to meet the needs of students at different schools.

Decentralizing a life skills program would be an immense change for a district and its teachers. This type of change could cause an issue for teachers with limited experience with students with severe disabilities. However, when inexperienced teachers are given adequate and meaningful training or professional development followed by the opportunity to practice and implement new accommodations, they formulate and solidify the importance of inclusive education (Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Jassen, 2012). Decentralizing a life skills program may not be feasible in the future but it is a concept that should be examined to increase the experiences of life skills students, general education students, and teachers working together in an inclusive school environment.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how life skills students impacted teacher attitude toward inclusion. This qualitative single case study involved one institution and was not generalizable. Therefore, it was unique to the current research about inclusion with students with

severe disabilities. Even though it was a unique case study, it added to the current literature (Alquraini, 2012; Chiner & Cardona, 2013, Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Southern, 2010) about inclusion and teacher attitude. There were six themes that this study uncovered on how life skills students impacted teacher attitude toward inclusion. Those themes that arose from the participants' perspectives led to three concrete findings. Educational leaders can utilize these three findings to create successful inclusive classrooms.

Interviews provided the opportunity for participants to clearly share their experiences with inclusive education (Creswell, 2013). Each teacher in this study had a unique experience that provided valuable insight to district leaders and to add information to current literature (Alquraini, 2012; Chiner & Cardona, 2013, Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Southern, 2010). Teachers in this study answered the questions thoughtfully, which led to the themes of this study.

Results from this study matched much of the literature regarding teacher attitude toward inclusion (Alquraini, 2012; Chiner & Cardona, 2013, Cook, 2001; Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013, Ross-Hill, 2009; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Southern, 2010). The results were not surprising, but strengthen outcomes already discovered. Consistently, themes of additional support, such as more training and qualified assistants were found in both the literature (Downing et al., 1997; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016) and this study. The hope is that if additional studies find the same results, then educational leaders will provide supports and resources for teachers to serve students with severe disabilities included in the general education classroom. Teachers in this study believed that these supports were necessary to have successful inclusive classrooms. An interesting result that did not match

the literature (Alquraini, 2012; Cook, 2001; Southern, 2010) was teachers' attitude toward students with severe disabilities. The school culture in this study may have had a positive effect on participating teachers' attitude.

The results from this study found that providing an opportunity for students with severe disabilities to be included in the general education classroom was not only their right, but also beneficial in numerous ways. It was important to find ways to support teachers so all students learn and thrive in an inclusive classroom. Students learned that although individuals may be very different (physically, mentally, and emotionally) from one another, they still had enough similarities to work together. This only strengthened schools and communities. This study provided a unique perspective of a school community and how including life skills students in general education classrooms impacts teacher attitude toward inclusion.

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## **Appendix A: Statement of Original Work**

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

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

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

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

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

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

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

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

**Statement of Original Work (Continued)**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

*Kim R.S. Bayer*

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Digital Signature

Kim R.S. Bayer

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Name (Typed)

9/26/18

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Date

## Appendix B: Demographic Survey

1. What is your gender?

*Male*

*Female*

2. How old are you?

*Under 25*

*25-29*

*30-39*

*40-49*

*50-59*

*60+*

3. How many years have you been working as a teacher?

*First Year*

*1-2*

*3-5*

*6-10*

*11-15*

*16-20*

*20+*

4. How long have you been working as a teacher at this school?

*First Year*

*1-2*

*3-5*

*6-10*

*11-15*

*16-20*

5. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?

*Bachelor's Degree*

*Master's Degree*

*Doctoral Degree*

6. What grade level grouping do you teach?

*Primary (Kindergarten – Third)*

*Intermediate (Fourth – Sixth)*

*Specialist*

7. How many professional development courses about inclusion have you attended in your teaching career?

*0 – 2*

*3-5*

*6-8*

*9-11*

*12+*

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

### **Behavioral**

- Are you willing to encourage students with a disability to participate in all social activities in the regular classroom? What about life skills students?
- Are you willing to adapt the curriculum to meet the individual needs of all students regardless of their ability? What about life skills students?
- Are you willing to physically include students with a severe disability in the regular classroom with the necessary supports? What about life skills students?
- Are you willing to modify the physical environment to include students with a disability in the regular classroom? What about for life skills students?
- Are you willing to adapt your communication techniques to ensure that all students with an emotional and behavioral disorder can be successfully included in the regular classroom? What about for life skills students?
- Are you willing to adapt the assessment of individual students in order for inclusive education to take place? What about for life skills students?
  - What supports can the district provide for you to have a successful inclusive classroom?

### **Affective**

- Do you become frustrated when you have difficulty communicating with students with a disability? What about with life skills students?
- Do you become upset when students with a disability cannot keep up with the day-to-day curriculum in your classroom? What about with life skills students?

- Are you concerned that students with a disability are included in the regular classroom, regardless of the severity of the disability?
- Do you become frustrated when you have to adapt the curriculum to meet the individual needs of all students? What about with life skills students?

### **Cognitive**

- Do you believe that any student can learn in the regular curriculum of the school if the curriculum is adapted to meet their individual needs?
- Should students with any type of disability be taught in special education classrooms? What about life skills students?
- Do you believe that inclusion assists with facilitating socially appropriate behavior amongst all students? What about for life skills students?
  - How could the school or district better support socially appropriate behavior in your classroom?
- Do you believe that students with a severe disability should be in special education schools so that they do not experience rejection in the regular school?