Cultivating Success: How Two General Education Teachers Created Inclusion Classrooms for Their Students

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CULTIVATING SUCCESS:
HOW TWO GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS CREATED
INCLUSION CLASSROOMS FOR THEIR STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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2018

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Tamara Lucas
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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

CULTIVATING SUCCESS:

HOW TWO GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS CREATED INCLUSION CLASSROOMS FOR THEIR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING SUCCESS:
HOW TWO GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS CREATED INCLUSION CLASSROOMS FOR THEIR STUDENTS

by Natalie A. Lacatena

This qualitative study examined the beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom climate of two general education inclusion teachers working in a single-teacher context. For purposes of this study, a single-teacher context was defined as a classroom in which a general education teacher instructed general education students and students with identified needs without the collaboration of a special education teacher. Two general education middle school teachers, nominated by their colleagues as successful at working with included students, completed a belief survey, participated in three one-on-one interviews, and were observed on eight separate occasions. A Disability Studies in Education lens was used as the framework for understanding the inclusion practices of these teachers. The following research question guided this study: How do successful middle school general education inclusion teachers create classrooms that enable their students classified as having a Specific Learning Disability to succeed?

Data were continuously analyzed to identify emerging themes, and the findings suggest that the convergence of the teachers’ beliefs and practices, which were informed by a social justice view of inclusion, was responsible for their success in their inclusion classrooms. Both teachers held affirming beliefs about the practice of inclusion and the capabilities of students with identified needs. They expressed a desire to teach these
students and emphasized the importance of the relationships they developed with them—relationships that were built on respect, authenticity, and genuineness. They designed instruction that was relevant to their students’ lives, and they implemented strategies such as differentiation and multi-sensory techniques to address the needs of their included students. Both teachers also approached their work as inclusion teachers from a social justice perspective. They viewed disability as a human rights issue and created classroom environments that provided all students with equal access to the educational program. While the teachers did identify challenges to inclusion, such as inconsistent personnel and lack of collaboration time, the findings highlight the teachers’ willingness to do whatever necessary to promote the success of students with identified needs in their inclusion classrooms. The study findings have implications for practice, research, and policy, which are discussed in the concluding chapter.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long and arduous journey to finally reach this pinnacle in my life—the attainment of my Ph.D. At times, it seemed like I would never achieve this goal, but with the support and guidance of many people, my dream is finally becoming a reality.

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DEDICATION

To my father and grandmother:

There are some who bring a light so great to the world that even after they have gone,

the light remains.

I miss you each and every day, but I feel your presence in everything I do

and carry your love with me always.
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Chapter One

Introduction and Conceptual Frame

Over the last four decades, federal special education legislation has transformed the way in which students with identified needs\(^1\) are being educated in kindergarten to grade 12 public schools in the United States (Blecker & Bloakes, 2010; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012). Students with identified needs, namely, those students between the ages of 3 and 21 who meet the eligibility criteria in one of 13 qualifying federally defined categories of disability, are increasingly placed in inclusive education (also known as inclusion) settings (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Obiakor et al., 2012). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 and its many reauthorizations, as well as the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) require that students with identified needs be given access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment—that is, alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible (Harrower, 1999; Holdheide & Reschly, 2008; Obiakor, 2011). As a result, students with identified needs now spend larger amounts of time in the mainstream, or general education, setting. In 1990-1991, 33% of students with identified

\(^1\) Various terms are used to refer to special education students, and many imply a deficit stance. While there is no perfect term, I have chosen to use ‘students with identified needs’ as it seems most relevant for my study. When referring to published works, I use the terms employed by the authors.
needs in the United States ages 6 to 21 spent at least 80% of their school day in the
general education setting. In contrast, in the fall of 2013, nearly 95% of students with
identified needs were enrolled in regular schools instead of in separate special education
schools, and 61.8% of these students spent at least 80% of their time in the general
education classroom (USDOE, NCES, 2016). While these statistics affirm an increase in
the number of students with identified needs being placed in the mainstream setting, they
do not provide insight into the nature of these inclusive experiences, for the students or
for the teachers responsible for their education.

In 2013-2014, students classified with specific learning disabilities (SLD)
represented the largest category of students served under IDEA Part B, accounting for
35% of the total number of classified students in the United States (USDOE, NCES,

the term ‘specific learning disability’ means a disorder in 1 or more of the basic
psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken
or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen,
think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (p. 11-12).

Second only to students receiving speech and language services, students classified as
SLD represented the largest category of classified students being educated in inclusive
settings. In fact, only 6.4% of students classified as SLD were educated outside of the
general education classroom for more than 60% of the day (USDOE, NCES, 2016).
Thus, the inclusion of students with identified needs in general education settings,
particularly those classified as SLD, affects growing numbers of general education teachers (Holdheide & Reschly, 2008),

In fact, with the increase in the number of students with identified needs into mainstream classes across the United States, general education teachers (i.e., teachers certified as elementary generalists or secondary teachers with specific content certification), rather than special educators, are assuming greater responsibility for educating these students (Berry, 2011; Grskovic, 2011; Swanson, 2008). General education teachers now play a critical role in curriculum development, lesson content and modification, and the delivery of instruction for students with identified needs (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009), and these students’ success rests heavily on the expertise of these teachers (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Holdheide & Reschly, 2008). In fact, the U.S. Department of Education (2002) has asserted that “consistently, the single biggest factor affecting student academic progress of populations of children is the effectiveness of the individual classroom teacher—period” (p. 52).

**Problem Statement**

Results of numerous studies suggest that effective inclusion teachers possess a repertoire of instructional skills aimed at modifying instruction for students with identified needs while also establishing a positive classroom atmosphere for all students built on the acceptance of individual student differences (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mantzicopoulos, Sturgeon, Goodwin, & Chung, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994; Worrell, 2008). Teacher modeling, instructional grouping, guided and independent practice with frequent progress monitoring, and controlling for task
difficulty are but a few examples of elements of instruction that result in significantly improved educational outcomes for students classified as SLD (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Although the extant research identifies these effective instructional practices for working with students classified as SLD, regrettably, these practices are not frequently used in the general education classroom primarily because inclusion teachers feel under-prepared to work with this student population (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006b; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Hwang & Evans, 2011).

Indeed, teachers report time and again that their teacher preparation programs did little to prepare them for teaching in an inclusive setting (e.g., DeSimone & Parmar, 2006a; Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Fuchs, 2010). Many teachers across a range of studies report being required to take very few, if any, special education courses in their teacher preparation programs (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Combs, Elliott, & Whipple, 2010; Hersman & Hodge, 2010). This research also indicates that of the courses they did take, most were survey-type courses that presented only a broad overview of disability classifications and special education laws. It is no surprise then that in-service general education teachers in numerous studies express uncertainty in their ability to adapt content and materials, provide individual student assistance, and manage student behavioral issues in inclusive classrooms (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009; Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999). General education teachers’ inadequate knowledge of instructional strategies for teaching students
with identified needs and the accompanying low self-efficacy are causes for concern regarding the ultimate success of inclusive education practices.

These findings are compounded by the seeming reluctance on the part of many general educators to actually perform the work of inclusive education. Studies over the past two decades report that teachers hold positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusion and believe that students with identified needs should be given the opportunity to learn with their general education peers, but many of them do not want to be the ones doing the teaching (Fuchs, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Many other general education teachers believe that delivering instruction in inclusive classrooms is not socially or academically beneficial to students with identified needs, or to their general education peers for that matter, and they would prefer to have students with identified needs educated in a pull-out setting (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006; Hwang & Evans, 2011). These research findings are troubling given the fact that teacher beliefs are critical for the success of inclusive education practices (Buell et al., 1999; Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000). As Lombardi and Woodrum (2000) emphasize, “If those who are responsible for the student’s education do not believe inclusionary practices are appropriate or are unwilling to modify their own roles and responsibilities, then such efforts are doomed” (p. 174). Thus, it is essential to understand general education teachers’ beliefs about inclusion, as well as their knowledge of and use of instructional practices related to inclusion.
A teacher’s beliefs, knowledge, and instruction as related to inclusion cannot be fully understood unless one also examines the model of inclusion that characterizes the teacher’s instructional setting. There are multiple inclusion service delivery models, a fact that has contributed to the complexity and confusion surrounding inclusion research (Holdheide & Reschly, 2008; Idol, 2006; Obiakor, 2011). Empirical studies primarily focus on a co-teaching or collaborative model of inclusion—a model that reflects a shared, and equal, responsibility between the general and special education teachers for the planning, delivery, and assessment of instruction for students with identified needs in the mainstream. Yet, in daily practice, this model—which requires school districts to pay two teachers to simultaneously instruct in the same classroom—is more costly than solely paying one general education teacher. For that reason, this co-teaching model is not predominantly used in public schools (Idol, 2006). Rather, in daily practice, a single-teacher model, as I am calling it, is often employed in inclusive settings. In this single-teacher model, general education teachers are largely left to their own devices, with minimal or no assistance from a special education teacher, to determine how best to accommodate and modify instruction for the students with identified needs in their classrooms. Despite the prevalence of this single-teacher model in practice, surprisingly little research has examined the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers using this model. Rather, empirical studies of general education teachers’ beliefs about and practices with inclusion have primarily focused on co-teaching models of inclusion (e.g., Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012).
Forty-two years after the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), statistics show that the number of students with identified needs included in general education settings continues to increase across the United States. Yet, previous reviews of the literature indicate that general education teachers from around the world—those responsible for the education of students with identified needs in their classrooms—are not any better prepared or necessarily more eager to teach these students than they were in the past (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Curcic, 2009; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Furthermore, although research identifies instructional practices that are effective in improving educational outcomes for SLD students (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003), these practices are not often used in the general education classroom because inclusion teachers do not feel adequately prepared to work with students with identified needs (Fuchs, 2010; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). In addition, although a collaborative, or co-teaching, model is generally regarded as the best service delivery method for inclusive education, and has been the focus of much research in inclusion, the single-teacher model remains prevalent in public school classrooms. In spite of this disheartening picture of inclusion, however, some general education inclusion teachers do indeed meet with success when working with students with identified needs. Thus, in order to better prepare general education teachers to work in inclusive settings, this study seeks to understand the work of identified successful inclusion teachers in a single-teacher setting.
Conceptual Framework

The field of special education has traditionally been grounded in a medical model framework that positions disability as a personal deficit (Ashby, 2012; Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Simmons, Blackmore, & Bayliss, 2008; Terzi, 2004). The causes of disability are viewed as primarily biological in nature, promoting a “pathognomonic” perspective that identifies disabilities as pathological and inherent in the individuals themselves (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Individuals with impaired abilities are thus labeled as abnormal and “less than” people without impairments. Disabilities are equated with sickness, disease, deficiency, and defectiveness; they are also viewed as tragic conditions that need to be “fixed” (Solis, 2006; Storey, 2007). These beliefs reflect an ableist perspective—one in which society regards those with disabilities through pity, fear, and shame. Ableism is defined as a “pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional, and physical disabilities” (Rauscher & McClintock, 2007, as cited in Ashby, 2010, p. 346). Ableism thus serves to privilege certain groups of people—in this case, persons without disabilities—while simultaneously discriminating against and excluding those with disabilities. Socially constructed meanings of normalcy deny persons with identified needs equal access to a variety of experiences, including those in academic contexts (Ashby, 2010). Hegemonic binaries such as normal/abnormal, capable/incapable, and competent/incompetent serve to oppress students with identified needs while reinforcing the dominance of students not identified or labeled as having disabilities.
In schools, this ableist perspective is manifested by the assumption that students with identified needs should perform in the same manner as their general education peers (Hehir, 2007). The belief that “normal” academic performance is the goal infers that all students must complete the same work and in the same way regardless of their cognitive, emotional, or physical needs and abilities. This enforced normalcy and “one size fits all” approach to learning result in serious educational inequities for students with identified needs (Ashby, 2010). For example, individual needs of this group of students are not likely to be considered by teachers who prefer normative ways of privileging speech, privileging writing, and privileging product over process (Ashby, 2010). In fact, not all students can use speech as their primary mode of communication and not all students can write by hand; individual students process information in very different ways. Some teachers who see differences in ability and approaches to learning as deficits believe that accommodating the abilities of students with identified needs is an “unreasonable burden” (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 1997, p. 337). Since students with identified needs possess abilities outside the culturally accepted and expected norm, they do not possess the cultural capital necessary to entice the dominant group (teachers) to modify their instruction (Griffin et al., 1997)—especially when those teachers already perceive their presence as a burden. In sum, when “normality” is too narrowly defined, the school environment is particularly oppressive to students with identified needs, and it does not allow them access to meaningful academic engagement (Griffin et al., 1997).

The espousal of a social model of disability, however, promotes rather than obstructs, an equitable education for all students. In contrast to an ableist perspective,
this model frames disability as a construct that is defined in relation to social and cultural contexts, rather than as a deficit that exists within the person (Ashby, 2012; Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Baglieri et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2008). This position does not refute the physiological basis of differences in abilities; instead, it argues that these differences become disabilities because of oppressive and discriminatory societal structures that cause the marginalization of individuals with disabilities. Thus, individuals with disabilities do not need to be “fixed;” the larger societal context does. A social model calls for the removal of environmental barriers that place limitations on individuals with disabilities, including barriers to educational opportunities in the classroom. From this orientation, teachers must accept differences among students, without labeling and stigmatizing them, and they must also provide students with identified needs with opportunities to be fully participating and valued members of their classes.

**Disability Studies in Education.** A social model of disability is one of the principal tenets of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), one lens used to situate and guide the present study. DSE is a sub-discipline of the interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies (DS), a field that is grounded in the belief that disability is both a social phenomenon and a human rights issue (Baglieri et al., 2011; Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). DSE was formally founded more than a decade ago with the intent to challenge traditional, oppressive understandings of disability that dominate special education research and pedagogy (Connor, Valle, & Hale, 2012). DSE scholars argue that differences between people are ordinary and acceptable, and “disability” only occurs as individuals interact in social contexts (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Baglieri et al., 2011).
Making the distinction between impairment and disability, Ashby (2012) contends that an individual who is unable to walk has an impairment in motor function; this condition only becomes disabling when “the person interacts with an inaccessible world” (p. 92). Thus, DSE scholars contend that *impairments* are natural variations that exist within individuals; *disabilities*, on the other hand, are the outcome of discriminatory and oppressive social and cultural structures and practices (Baglieri et al., 2011; Terzi, 2004).

As stated previously, existing structures and practices within schools often serve to reinforce the oppression of students with identified needs. The inclusion movement, however, seeks to minimize such marginalization by transforming the “structures of classrooms and the manner in which children with differences are treated in these classrooms” (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004, p. 526). Built on the principle of social justice, inclusion provides access and equity for all students by educating students with identified needs with their general education peers in the same schools and classrooms in which they would have been educated in the absence of a special education classification (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Lombardi & Woodrum, 2000). In an inclusive environment, special education services are brought to the student rather than the student being brought to the services in a segregated setting (Lombardi & Woodrum, 2000; Taylor, 2011). It is critical to recognize that inclusive settings are not defined solely by their “location;” rather, it is the manner in which students with identified needs are treated within these settings that distinguishes the space as an inclusive classroom. One such example is the difference between inclusive classrooms and mainstream classrooms—a significant distinction that has important implications for
students with identified needs (Brady, Hunter, & Campbell, 1997; Lalvani, 2013; Lombardi & Woodrum, 2000). Lombardi and Woodrum (2000) distinguish these two concepts as follows:

Mainstreaming has more to do with acceptance of students with disabilities in general classes providing they can adjust to methods, materials and curriculum being taught. Inclusion involves making necessary adaptations in methods, materials and curriculum so such integration can be successful (p. 178).

Lalvani (2013) provides a powerful metaphor for understanding the difference between these two practices, arguing that the difference between mainstreaming and inclusion is like the difference between visiting a classroom and having full membership in it.

Using a DSE lens to frame my research offers a means for understanding the concept of inclusion. Additionally, it provides a way of conceptualizing disability within theory, research, and practice (Ashby, 2012; Connor et al., 2012). Historical and sociocultural contexts create oppressive practices in education, and even when students with identified needs are included in general education classrooms, it remains difficult for these students to avoid marginalization (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Broderick, Hawkins, Henze, Mirasol-Spath, Pollack-Berkovits, Clune, Skovera, & Steel, 2012). As stated above, locating students with identified needs in inclusive settings without valuing, respecting, and honoring their individual differences actually leads to exclusionary practices—the antithesis of the intended purpose of inclusion.
Relational-Cultural Theory. Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), a theory of human development, posits similar views about marginalization and privilege. According to RCT, society and institutions are stratified into domains that support dominant groups while marginalizing other groups (Duffey & Trepal, 2016; Jordan, 2001; Jordan, 2008b). Dominant groups protect the rewards and advantages they experience by creating a culture of fear through the perpetuation of negative relational and controlling images of individuals from marginalized groups (Miller, 2008). These controlling images confirm the power of the dominant group and normalize the process of oppression, thus maintaining the hierarchical status quo (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzhc, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008; Miller, 2008). Dominant groups possess “power-over” others because they have more resources and privilege than marginalized groups (Jordan, 2008a; Miller, 2008). This stratification results in social exclusion, pain, and trauma, as well as personal and societal disconnections (Jordan, 2008a; Jordan, 2017). In order to reduce the oppression and suffering experienced by less dominant groups, the RCT model espouses the importance of developing relationships that emphasize an attitude of respect and mutuality between people (Jordan, 2001).

RCT was originally developed by Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at The Stone Center at Wellesley College as a way to understand women’s psychological development in a mental health context (Jordan, 2017). From this orientation, human growth occurs within relationships; that is, individuals grow in connection with one another, and both parties benefit from the relationship (Jordan, 2000; Jordan, 2001; Jordan, 2008a). The four core characteristics of growth-fostering relationships in an RCT
framework are mutual engagement and empathy, authenticity, empowerment, and the ability to deal with conflict (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2008a; Jordan 2017). Mutual engagement is defined as mutual participation, commitment, and sensitivity in the relationship while mutual empathy is a relational process in which both people are willing to be vulnerable and be affected by the other (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002). Authenticity is defined as the capacity to be completely genuine in the relationship while concurrently maintaining an awareness of the impact of this candidness on the other person (Liang et al., 2002). Empowerment, the third characteristic of growth-fostering relationships, is the sense of personal strength and confidence that emerges from the relationship. The fourth characteristic—the ability to deal with conflict—encompasses expressing one’s differences in a way that fosters both mutual empowerment and empathy (Liang et al., 2002). RCT suggests that individuals who engage in such growth-fostering interactions subsequently benefit from “five good things”: a sense of zest; clarity about self, other, and the relationship; a sense of personal worth; an enhanced capacity to be creative and productive; and the desire for more connection (Jordan, 2008a). In sum, RCT is a relational model that emphasizes interdependence and growth through relationships, not through separation and independence.

RCT was originally focused on women’s mental health, but in recent years, this approach has been used to understand the experiences of all groups, especially those who are marginalized due to imbalances in power and privilege (Comstock et al., 2008; Duffey & Trepal, 2016; Jordan, 2008a; Jordan, 2017; Purgason, Avent, Cashwell, Jordan,
& Reese, 2016). As previously discussed in this section, oppressive practices occur in the field of education, and students with identified needs often experience marginalization because their ways of learning are not privileged. Because these students lack the cultural capital to convince teachers—who possess the power—to respect and accommodate their needs, schools become an oppressive environment for them. For example, when a student with identified needs in the area of writing is supposed to receive alternative response accommodations in his Individualized Education Program (IEP), yet the teacher does not provide this, the student learns that the teacher does not respect his/her way of learning and that perhaps there is something inherently wrong with his academic abilities. The student is likely to believe that his work is not valued by the teacher. Thus, the student may begin to disconnect from the teacher and to act in an inauthentic manner, trying to perform in a way that is acceptable to the more powerful adult. This situation can be further compounded by relationships with general education peers—those who learn in a normative way—who also view students with identified needs as different and “lesser than.” These negative relationships cause students with identified needs to be isolated and silenced within their own classrooms. If, however, teachers and students nurture relationships built on empathy, respect for differences, and authenticity—as suggested by RCT scholars—instead of relationships based on shaming and stigmatizing, then it is possible to lessen students’ experiences of oppression and marginalization. Teachers and general education students can begin to view these students in a more empathic way as they embrace a “power-with” rather than a “power-over” dynamic (Jordan, 2008a; Walker, 2008). Such a relationship built on mutual
empowerment helps to deepen students’ creative pursuits and increases their capacity for learning (Duffey, 2006).

In this study, I will employ a DSE and RCT framework to analyze the beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom environments of identified successful general education inclusion teachers. Specifically, a DSE lens will be used to analyze general education teachers’ beliefs to determine whether they view disability as an instance of deficit and abnormality or as an instance of human diversity (Connor et al., 2012; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). This lens will also be used to examine whether general education teachers build on the individual strengths of students with identified needs or merely attempt to remediate the students’ perceived deficits. From an RCT perspective, I will examine the nature of teacher-student relationships, as well as peer to peer relationships, in terms of mutuality and authenticity. Finally, I will use these perspectives to identify inclusion practices that have the potential to transform the structures of inclusive classrooms so that they are more socially just and equitable for all students.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

This review examines claims and findings in the published empirical literature regarding general education teachers’ beliefs about inclusion, identified instructional practices that increase the academic achievement of students classified as SLD, and the influence of classroom climate on student outcomes. The literature search was conducted in three parts—each one focused on the individual themes identified above—and thus, the criteria for each search varied. When conducting all searches, however, I limited studies to the United States context because the sociocultural, educational, and policy context varies so widely in different national settings (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

When searching the literature for teacher beliefs, I only included studies that focused on the beliefs of general education teachers working with students with identified needs within the context of single-teacher inclusive classrooms—that is, classrooms where a general education teacher instructs general education students and students with identified needs without the collaboration of a special education teacher. In some studies, the model of inclusion was either not defined or could not be inferred from the description of the setting and the participants (e.g., Del Rosario, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2003). I gave these studies “the benefit of the doubt” and included them, not least because there are so few relevant studies using a single-teacher model of inclusion currently published in academic journals. The search revealed that many researchers use the constructs of belief and attitude to refer to similar phenomena. According to Pajares (1992), beliefs “travel in disguise” (p. 309) and terms such as beliefs, attitudes,
perceptions, and judgments are frequently used interchangeably in the literature. For the purpose of this review, I chose to use belief in the broadest sense (which included attitudes, perceptions, and other concepts that require a person’s judgment regarding “the truth or falsity of a proposition” [Pajares, 1992, p. 316]), primarily because the researchers rarely define these constructs in their work. Furthermore, in these studies, the researchers tend to speak about these constructs in relation to teacher behaviors, practices, and self-efficacy—language that is often associated with beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Through this process, I identified few relevant studies, 19 in total, using a single-teacher model of inclusion that satisfied the criteria for inclusion.

When searching for literature on instructional practices, however, I used quite different criteria. In this instance, I did not limit the context of the studies to single-teacher inclusive classrooms nor did I focus solely on general education teachers. Regarding the instructional practices literature, I was most concerned with the recipients of the instruction rather than with the individuals who delivered the instruction or the context in which it was delivered. Specifically, I focused on instructional strategies that raised the academic achievement of students classified as SLD. I eliminated studies that did not disaggregate the results according to individual student groupings such as SLD, emotionally disturbed, and students at-risk for academic failure. Using these criteria, I identified 65 pertinent studies.

My search criteria for classroom climate were similar to those regarding instructional practices in that I did not limit the context of the studies to inclusive classrooms nor did I focus exclusively on general education teachers. Rather, when
conducting this search, I was primarily concerned with the grade level of the students. Because my research is focused on middle school settings, and because adolescents undergo a period of change, adjustment, and transition at this time (Larkins-Strathy & LaRocco, 2007; Stuhlman, Hamre, & Planta, 2002)—it was important to include those studies most relevant to this specific age group. I eliminated studies conducted in preschool, elementary, and post-secondary settings. I did, however, include several studies focused on secondary settings that included both high school and middle school students and teachers. I identified 21 studies using these criteria.

Teacher Beliefs

The research on teacher beliefs about students with identified needs covers a range of subject areas including mathematics, history, and English, with the decidedly largest number focused on physical education teachers. Regardless of the specific content taught or the research methodology employed, however, four broad categories or themes were identified: beliefs about inclusion, beliefs about students with identified needs, self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs about their competence) for teaching included students, and beliefs about inclusive classroom practices. Collectively, these studies advance our knowledge about the complex, and often contradictory, beliefs that teachers hold regarding the concept of inclusion.

Beliefs about inclusion

Teacher beliefs are critical to the success of inclusion since their beliefs are likely to influence their behaviors in the classroom (Kagan, 1992). The 16 identified studies that focused on teachers’ beliefs about inclusion highlight the complex nature of beliefs
about inclusion held by general education teachers across varying grade levels and subjects. The review revealed that teachers have various and sometimes conflicting beliefs about inclusion and that they report several challenges and concerns regarding their success in working in these settings. I discuss these findings below.

**Differing and apparently conflicting beliefs.** Twelve studies of general education teachers’ beliefs about inclusion indicate that these beliefs vary considerably. In four studies, teachers expressed overwhelmingly positive beliefs about inclusive practices and teaching students with identified needs (Del Rosario, 2006; Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Ross-Hill, 2009). For example, findings of a single case study of Janice, a high school English teacher, revealed that she valued the diversity and differences among her students, and she believed that general education teachers must be open-minded and willing to compromise when developing relationships with their students (Del Rosario, 2006). Additionally, 89% of 1,088 science teachers surveyed in a national online survey believed that students with identified needs benefit from science activities while 85% believed it was possible for them to be active participants in all laboratory experiences (Kahn & Lewis, 2014). On the other hand, participants in van Hover and Yeager’s (2003) study reported inconsistent beliefs ranging from feelings of support toward inclusion to feelings of hostility. During one-to-one interviews, the majority of high school teachers in this study expressed the belief that students with identified needs deserve to be placed in general education settings even though the students would require extra assistance. This was in sharp contrast, however, to the negative beliefs of two middle school teachers—one who asserted, “I hate to track, but I have a system that if a
kid shows promise they can be mainstreamed. If [students] show no promise and are problems, put them in another environment” (van Hover & Yeager, 2003, p. 40). In fact, while teachers often reported the belief that students with identified needs should be included in general education classrooms, they did not necessarily believe they are best taught in this setting (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006a), and they also expressed frustration about the increased demands of time and attention that these students placed on them (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, & O’Sullivan, 2004). This tension between welcoming students with identified needs into their classroom communities, on the one hand, and acknowledging the special challenges of having them there, on the other hand, is clearly evident in the literature.

These results suggest that beliefs toward inclusion are complex and multifaceted. Yet, consistent with the findings of previous reviews of the research literature (Curcic, 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), most teachers surveyed in these studies did not possess predominantly affirming views about the practice of inclusion. A synthesis of 28 individual studies conducted in the United States, Australia, and Canada from 1958 to 1995 (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) found that two-thirds of teachers surveyed supported the concept of inclusion, whereas only a slight majority actually expressed a willingness to perform the work required of an inclusive teacher. Another more recent review of studies conducted in 18 different countries (Curcic, 2009) found that teachers identified increased social interaction among students as positive aspects of inclusion but also expressed the fear that inclusion may lead to neglect of general education students as a
negative factor. Finally, primary school teachers in the most recent review of 26 international studies (de Boer et al., 2011) reported predominantly neutral or negative attitudes toward inclusion. The findings of these earlier reviews, which are echoed in the studies included in the current review, suggest that teachers’ beliefs toward inclusion are often conflicting, a situation that has not changed over the years despite the increased placement of students with identified needs into general education settings.

**Challenges and concerns.** A number of studies found that, even when general education teachers did believe in inclusion, they still reported many challenges working in inclusive settings. Challenges reported across grade levels and subject matter focused primarily on a lack of administrative support in the following areas: insufficient time for general education teachers to prepare and deliver their lessons; lack of materials and resources; large class sizes; and little or no in-service training focused on topics of inclusion (DeSimone, 2006a; Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Hodge et al., 2004; Smith & Smith, 2000; van Hove & Yeager, 2003). Some high school physical education teachers expressed a lack of knowledge about how to best modify and adapt their instruction (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hersman & Hodge, 2010), and many stated that this was even more difficult when working with students with more severe disabilities, identified in this case as attention deficit disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, and severe emotional-behavioral disabilities (Hersman & Hodge, 2010). All 10 participating elementary and secondary teachers in a survey research study commented that they did not have adequate time to collaborate with each other or their special education colleagues (Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover, 1997). Even these teachers, who were
nominated by both their principals and special education teacher colleagues as being proficient at making classroom accommodations for students with identified needs, recognized that many challenges can—and do—prevent the success of inclusive education practices.

Seeking to understand how to help teachers overcome their challenges and concerns, Harding and Darling (2003) asked two middle and two high school Family and Consumer Science teachers what could help them most in their work with students with identified needs. All four teachers responded that having an additional adult in the room to assist the included students would be a tremendous benefit to them. The school-to-work and technical preparation teachers in a study by Lombard, Miller, and Hazelkorn (1998) provided further insight into this question. While 58% of teachers surveyed indicated that the skills needed to teach students with and without identified needs are not the same, slightly more than half commented that they could meet the needs of included students if given additional preparation and training in this area, if provided with additional consultative support from special education staff, and if given an effective set of methods, materials, and techniques.

Findings suggest that teachers face a variety of challenges working in their inclusive classrooms: large class sizes, inadequate preparation for teaching students with identified needs, insufficient time to prepare lessons and collaborate with special education teachers, and a lack of materials and supplies. Teachers in two other studies, though, suggested that additional personnel support, relevant training, as well as adequate resources may improve their ability to address the needs of students with identified needs.
in their inclusion classrooms. Therefore, although challenges exist, some general education inclusion teachers believe they can be overcome if appropriate supports are put in place for them.

**Beliefs about students with identified needs**

Only four studies focused on general education teachers’ beliefs about students with identified needs. Findings of two qualitative studies indicate that general education teachers hold mostly positive beliefs about students with identified needs. Robinson (2002) and van Hover & Yeager (2003) interviewed high school teachers and found they believed that students with identified needs were capable and deserved to be placed in a general education setting. Additionally, they did not view included students as lazy or less motivated than their non-disabled peers to complete homework assignments (van Hover & Yeager, 2003). Typifying this perspective, one teacher declared, “I’m a firm believer in inclusion. I think it should happen everywhere. [Inclusion] is much better than if you single them out and they become this identifiable body of kids, ‘the dummies’” (van Hover & Yeager, 2003, p. 41). This comment reflects a DSE view, suggesting that this teacher recognized how school structures—namely, separate classes for students with identified needs—can marginalize and stigmatize these students. Several teachers in this study acknowledged that included students often lacked background knowledge and required extra assistance in the classroom, but this did not seem to change their overall positive beliefs about students with identified needs.

In contrast, in a set of early studies by Zigmond, Levin, and Laurie (1985), general education inclusion teachers reported largely negative beliefs about their included
students. These researchers examined the extent to which high school teacher attitudes and student behaviors contributed to the failure of included students classified as learning disabled. Their investigation was comprised of four separate studies, but only the first two of these studies are included here because the last two did not meet the criteria for inclusion in this review. In the first investigation, 429 high school teachers completed a four-item questionnaire to assess their attitudes toward the students classified as learning disabled in their mainstream classes. The majority of teachers (64%) surveyed reported that students classified as learning disabled were different from other students in their classes, especially in the area of basic skills competence; 68% of teachers believed the presence of these students put additional demands on the teachers; and 26% stated that students classified as learning disabled should not remain in their classes. Based on interviews with a randomly selected subset of the original sample, the researchers found slightly different results: a larger percentage of teachers (75%) believed students classified as learning disabled were deficient in their academic skills while fewer (55%) reported a belief that students placed an additional burden on them in their classrooms. The findings of these studies suggest that these teachers possessed overall negative beliefs about students with identified needs, and they viewed disability from a medically-based, deficit perspective. These teachers focused on the differences between included students and their general education peers—differences that were not valued and respected, but rather viewed as personal weaknesses inherent to the students with identified needs—a perspective that is antithetical to a DSE view.
Teachers in a more recent study based their beliefs about students with identified needs on other extenuating factors. Smith and Smith (2000) examined the beliefs of teachers in a small urban school district who identified themselves as either successful or unsuccessful with inclusive practices. These researchers found that teachers who perceived themselves as successful with inclusion made more positive remarks about students with identified needs than those who rated themselves as less successful. For instance, when describing a child classified as autistic, a successful teacher stated, “He is able to come in and is able to sit down now, and kind of get in with what we’re doing, where[as] at the beginning of the year . . . he just yelled out or made noises” (Smith & Smith 2000, p. 168). In contrast, an unsuccessful teacher commented more critically about a student classified as autistic, saying, “By the end of the day . . . I need 10 minutes away . . . or I’m going to scream because no matter what he has on his mind, he has to tell you ASAP . . . he is also off task 90% of the time. He will get nothing done unless you sit with him one-to-one” (p. 168). The successful teacher acknowledged the growth made by the child while the unsuccessful teacher spoke in a more negative tone and emphasized the student’s weaknesses. These findings suggest the nature of teachers’ articulated beliefs about students with identified needs were associated with their own perceived level of success working in inclusive settings.

In sum, the findings of this small set of studies suggest that general education inclusion teachers hold differing beliefs about the students with identified needs in their classes. In a study conducted over 30 years ago, teachers expressed negative views of students with identified needs. The majority of teachers in this study believed these
students were deficient in their skills and did not belong in their classes. On the other hand, teachers in two more recent studies expressed predominantly positive beliefs about their included students, indicating that although these students require additional teacher assistance, they are capable of learning and should be included in the general education setting. These findings, along with the results of the study by Smith and Smith (2010), illustrate teachers’ differing beliefs about students with identified needs and also suggest that perhaps, it is general education teachers’ perceptions of their own success working in inclusive settings that influences their beliefs about the included students in their classes.

Self-efficacy for teaching included students

A subset of nine studies focused on general education teachers’ self-efficacy regarding inclusion and working with students with identified needs. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s own competence and ability to succeed in particular situations (Bandura, 1989). For the purposes of this review, self-efficacy refers to teachers’ beliefs about their ability to work with students with identified needs in inclusive settings. Studies in this section focus on factors that influence this belief. Inadequate preparation was the most frequently cited influence on teachers’ self-efficacy for teaching included students, but they also reported experiences, knowledge, student disability type and severity, and level of support as influences on their confidence to effectively teach students with identified needs.

Preparation. Teachers’ preparation for teaching included students was identified in six studies as an important influence on teacher self-efficacy—specifically, the number of courses teachers have taken regarding working with students with identified needs.
(Bender et al., 1995; Combs et al., 2010). In these studies, general education teachers who had taken more courses on teaching students with identified needs reported more positive attitudes—and a greater sense of personal efficacy—towards mainstreaming than those teachers who had taken fewer courses. In the study by Combs and colleagues (2010), the researchers used interviews to collect in-depth descriptive information from four elementary physical education teachers. One of the two teachers with high levels of confidence working with students with identified needs attributed her self-efficacy to her college coursework. She commented, “I was pretty much in favor of inclusion before I returned to graduate school but the classes I took there helped me to learn the ways that I could teach these children” (Combs et al., 2010, p. 122). On the other hand, the two teachers who had not taken any adapted physical education courses reported that they did not feel well prepared to teach students with identified needs in their inclusive classes.

Interestingly, results from a more recent study seem to contradict these findings. According to the findings of a national online survey of K-12 science teachers (Kahn & Lewis, 2014), only 42% of respondents identified college courses as a source of preparation while another 28% identified on the job training as a means for learning about inclusive practices. Regardless of the manner in which they received training, however, results indicated that any training was associated with positive teacher preparedness.

Across studies, teachers further expressed a desire for additional professional preparation in both pre-service and in-service settings in order to better meet the needs of their included students—preparation that would enhance their self-efficacy beliefs. In a
series of qualitative case studies by Hodge and colleagues, physical education teachers repeatedly commented that additional coursework on inclusive pedagogy and behavior management strategies, as well as hands-on experiences at the pre-service level, would allow them to gain practical knowledge working with students with identified needs (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Hersman & Hodge, 2010). Teachers also wanted more and better professional development opportunities at the in-service level to help them improve their skills. As one physical education teacher declared, “I need to learn more ideas and strategies to implement in my classes for educating students with disabilities. I need to learn more about each disability...what they can and cannot do [to] plan more appropriate activities for that student” (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010, p. 148). These types of experiences, teachers argued, would enable them to better plan, adapt, modify, and deliver their physical education lessons for students with identified needs—which would strengthen their self-efficacy.

**Other influences on teachers’ self-efficacy.** Seven studies identify several other factors that influence teachers’ self-efficacy, namely, knowledge, student disability type and severity, availability of resources and support, class load, and teachers’ classroom experiences. For example, general education teachers with more years of experience teaching students with identified needs, coupled with higher levels of knowledge from informal and formal training, expressed higher levels of confidence in teaching included students (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Hersman & Hodge, 2010). Support and assistance from others, whether administrative support, mentoring, the presence of a paraprofessional in the classroom, or the opportunity to collaborate with special
education teachers for planning and other purposes, also made a difference in teachers’ perceived effectiveness (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006a; Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Hodge et al., 2004). One case study (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010) found that suburban high school teachers believed it was the students themselves who were the greatest influence on teachers’ enhanced confidence. One participant commented, “The students with disabilities have had the greatest influence on my teaching students with disabilities...In particular, the girl [with spina bifida] I have now in the wheelchair. She does not want any pity. She wants to participate in PE class just like her peers. She made the experience, which was initially viewed upon with trepidation, a positive and favorable experience” (p. 149).

Furthermore, in study after study, general education teachers expressed higher self-efficacy when working with students with mild disabilities compared to students with more severe disabilities, although teachers’ classifications of mild and severe disabilities differed slightly across investigations (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Hodge et al., 2004; Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Smith & Smith, 2000). Typically, mild disabilities were identified as learning disabilities while emotional and behavioral disorders, autism, and attention deficits with and without hyperactivity were considered to be severe disabilities. Teachers who had a smaller overall class size, who had fewer numbers of included students, and who taught in lower grade levels also reported greater self-efficacy (Bender et al., 1995; Hodge et al., 2004; Smith & Smith, 2000). Across these studies, teachers reported often being faced with multiple factors at
once, thus compounding their low sense of confidence in their ability to effectively work with students with identified needs.

**Beliefs about inclusive classroom practices**

The fourth major theme regarding teacher beliefs identified in this review was teacher beliefs about inclusive classroom practices. Findings in these five studies were typically reported in terms of teachers’ beliefs about the use of specific instructional strategies or about modifications or adaptations made to instructional planning and delivery. These studies are consistent with the findings of studies discussed above in that general education teachers held divergent beliefs about the implementation of inclusive classroom practices they deemed effective or feasible in working with students with identified needs.

General education teachers in three studies reported diverse beliefs about their responsibility to implement specific instructional practices in their inclusion classrooms. Robinson (2002) conducted interviews and class observations of four New York high school science teachers who taught a Regents science course—a course consisting of a state-adopted curriculum and an end-of-year high-stakes standardized assessment—and he found that all teachers included in this study shared a belief that students with identified needs were capable of learning science in an inclusion classroom. Although the teachers implemented modifications listed in students’ IEPs, they did not create separate lesson plans specifically for their included students. Also, because learning outcomes and Regents exams were the same for all students, these teachers believed instruction and assessment practices for students with identified needs should be similar
to those used with general education students. In contrast to this study, Olson and colleagues (1997) interviewed ten elementary and secondary inclusion teachers from metropolitan and rural areas to determine why they were seen as successful inclusion teachers. While specific strategies were not identified, all teachers expressed to varying degrees that it was their responsibility to teach as well as to individualize their instruction for students with identified needs. They also acknowledged the need to adjust their expectations for students with identified needs in order for them to meet with academic success. In yet another study, van Hover and Yeager (2003) reported inconsistent findings about the use of instructional strategies in inclusion classrooms. In this study of experienced secondary history inclusion teachers, only five of the 12 teachers reported the use of specific strategies—specifically, providing students with copies of class notes and providing extended time for tests and assignments. In fact, one middle school teacher in this study, who did not believe in accommodating included students, declared that “adaptations are insane” (van Hover & Yeager, 2003, p. 39). Thus, the findings of these three studies indicate that teachers across grade levels possessed diverse beliefs about whether or not to implement specific inclusive practices. Furthermore, the researchers acknowledged that even when teachers did adapt their classroom instruction, the strategies and modifications were generally superficial in nature. Results of another study suggest that the ultimate implementation of such practices, however, was also dependent on other factors.

Combs, Elliott, and Whipple (2010) conducted a study to determine how teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion affected their teaching. They studied four elementary physical
education teachers who had at least one child with mild to moderate mental disabilities included in their general education classes. Based on responses from a questionnaire about their attitudes toward inclusion, the authors identified the two teachers who expressed the most positive attitudes toward inclusion and the two teachers who expressed the most negative attitudes toward inclusion and engaged them in individual in-depth interviews. The researchers found that the teachers with positive attitudes expressed a stronger belief in the use of inclusive practices than the teachers with negative attitudes. For example, one teacher who held a positive attitude toward inclusion believed that, as a teacher, she should identify any potential challenges students with identified needs might experience in her class and “design activities that could be adjusted for every skill level” (Combs et al., 2010, p. 118). Another teacher with a positive attitude believed in using proximity, individualized instruction, and positive reinforcement to accommodate the included students in her class. This teacher also listed numerous modifications for each planned activity so that she could address the varying needs of her students. In sharp contrast, one teacher with a negative attitude toward inclusion stated that she did not plan any special accommodations for students with identified needs, explaining, “I don’t feel that I should turn my lesson upside down just for one child” (Combs et al., 2010, p. 120). In this study, teachers with positive attitudes believed that it was appropriate to use a variety of teaching styles to address fitness concepts, motor skills, and affective domains of learning while teachers with negative attitudes did not believe in making accommodations for students with identified needs.
The final study included in this section examined the beliefs, skills, and practices of 60 elementary, middle, and high school inclusion teachers from 18 schools within the same metropolitan school district (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994). Using a mixed methods approach including self-reports, interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations, they concluded that the general education teachers’ self-reported beliefs about the importance of specific adaptations for students classified as learning disabled were significantly different from their practices in the classroom. While elementary teachers did use a variety of instructional adaptations, such as flexible grouping, pacing, and modified grading, they did not prepare individual lesson plans for students classified as learning disabled. Unlike the elementary teachers in this study, middle and high school teachers implemented very few instructional adaptations, and they essentially expected students classified as learning disabled to learn the same content and complete the same activities as their general education peers. Thus, even though teachers believed adaptations were valuable, and they believed they were skilled at making these modifications, they did not often put these adaptations into their daily practice.

The findings of these five studies suggest that general education inclusion teachers hold inconsistent beliefs about their use of adaptive classroom practices. Across these studies, general education teachers did not plan extensively for students with identified needs in their inclusive classrooms, and they did not consistently modify their instructional practices. Some teachers, like the New York State science teachers, believed it was necessary to teach all students in the same manner, while others,
especially those with positive attitudes about inclusion, believed it was their responsibility to make adaptations to their instruction in order to meet the needs of their included students. Regrettably, in some instances, even when teachers believed adaptations were valuable, they did not often implement these practices in their instruction. Furthermore, even when adaptations were employed, they were generally superficial in nature.

**Instructional Practices**

Students classified as learning disabled demonstrate difficulties in their ability to learn, and even when they “possess the necessary cognitive tools to effectively process information, for some reason they do so very inefficiently” (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001, p. 280). This may be due to the students’ inability to manage their cognitive activities in a purposeful manner or to their lack of knowledge of, or failure to activate, appropriate strategies to successfully access information (Gajria, Jitendra, Sood & Sacks, 2007). In fact, students classified as learning disabled often lack the strategies that “good learners” tend to possess more naturally. The challenge for teachers, therefore, is to identify instructional interventions that are best suited to help students classified as learning disabled overcome their personal learning challenges. Thus, the second major focus of this literature review is on the instructional practices of mainstream teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Over the years, educational researchers have identified a range of instructional practices that increase the academic achievement of students classified as SLD (e.g., Chard et al., 2002; McLeskey & Waldrond, 2011; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Vaughn &
Linan-Thompson, 2003). Since the 1970s, researchers have analyzed various instructional practices such as sequencing, questioning strategies, the use of advance organizers, and guided practice to determine whether they were effective in remediating the academic difficulties of students classified as SLD. The implementation of some individual instructional practices, such as one-to-one or small group instruction, controlling the difficulty of the task, drill-repetition-practice, and segmentation, have been found to predict students’ academic improvement while the predictive power of other individual components, such as non-teacher instruction and anticipatory responses, has not been found to be as strong (Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998). In their synthesizes of decades of research, several researchers (e.g., Montague, 2008; Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000) not only examined these components for their singular merit, but they also investigated how various components worked together. In this work, instructional components were often organized into two primary models of instruction—direct instruction and strategic instruction to ascertain whether one instructional approach is more effective than the other when teaching students classified as SLD.

Direct instruction, also known as explicit instruction, is characterized by the explicit and systematic teaching of a specific skill set (Montague, 2008; Rosenshine, 1987; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998). Rosenshine (1987) explains that direct instruction emphasizes “proceeding in small steps, checking for student understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all students” (p. 34). Direct instruction emphasizes fast-paced, well-sequenced, and highly focused lessons in which teachers
typically review and check previous work, present new material in small steps, guide practice, offer feedback, monitor independent practice, and provide frequent review of content (Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000). Thus, when teachers incorporate these types of activities into their instructional practice and the lesson is focused on isolated skill acquisition, this is considered direct instruction.

Strategy instruction, on the other hand, is generally focused on the routines, plans of action, and processes involved in learning (Swanson, 2001; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000). Using this approach, teachers provide students with cognitive strategies that help them process a problem and develop a response or solution. Rosenshine (1995) defines a cognitive strategy as “a heuristic or guide that serves to support or facilitate the learner as she or he develops internal procedures that enable them [sic] to perform the higher level operations” (page 266). Accordingly, when multiple instructional activities that foster student use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are included in a teacher’s instruction, this is categorized as strategy instruction.

Thus, it seems that a key point of distinction between direct instruction and strategy instruction rests on the focus of the instruction. Direct instruction is characterized as a bottom-up processing approach that focuses primarily on isolated skill acquisition while strategy instruction uses a top-down processing approach to help students gain global skills, strategies, and general rules for learning (Swanson, 2001). This distinction between direct instruction and strategy instruction is not always easy to discern, however, because the two instructional approaches also share many characteristics. According to Swanson (2001), both models follow a similar sequence of
teaching tasks such as stating the learning objective and reviewing the necessary skills to understand the lesson’s objective, and both models also identify the same six components of effective methods of instruction: daily reviews, statement of instructional objective, teacher presentation of new material, guided practice, independent practice, and formative evaluations.

**Direct Instruction**

As discussed above, direct instruction techniques include the explicit delivery of content in which teachers check for student understanding while systematically reducing their support and transferring the responsibility of independent learning to the students. A search of the literature resulted in only three studies that concentrated exclusively on direct instruction techniques that were not focused on the direct instruction of a strategy (Darch & Kameenui, 1987; Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Pany, Jenkins & Schreck, 1982). These studies, two of which were conducted by Pany and her colleagues, were carried out between 1978 and 1987; thus, it appears that current research is not focused on the use of a direct instruction approach with students with identified needs.

In two separate studies, Pany and her colleagues employed similar instructional conditions to examine the use of direct instructional strategies to teach reading skills and vocabulary acquisition to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students classified as learning disabled (Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Pany et al., 1982). In the 1978 study, students served as their own control in three different conditions to determine the relative effectiveness of direct instruction on the recall of word meanings and recall of facts from a story. In the Meanings from Context condition, no direct instruction was provided to students; in the
Meanings Given condition, the instructor provided students with the meaning of preselected vocabulary words; and in the Meanings Practiced condition, teachers used the greatest amount of direct instruction by requiring students to practice word meanings using a flash card technique. Student scores in the Meanings Practiced condition were significantly higher than in either of the other two conditions on an oral test of isolated word meanings both immediately after reading a story and again after a three to eight week time period. When a No-Meanings Control condition was added to the 1982 study, results once again indicated that students classified as learning disabled acquired significantly more word meanings, and also had greater transfer of word meanings to sentence comprehension tasks, in the Meanings Practiced condition than in any other condition. In this same study (Pany et al., 1982), the performance of typically achieving fourth grade readers was also examined, and they too performed significantly better under the Practice condition. However, results also demonstrated that students classified as learning disabled required more direct instruction than their general education peers before evidencing significant vocabulary growth. Collectively, this limited line of research suggests that direct instruction, compared to less structured and explicit instructional approaches, led to significantly stronger student performance on measures of academic achievement.

**Strategy Instruction**

Strategy instruction consists of powerful cognitive interventions that provide students with a series of specific steps or general guidelines to facilitate their understanding and problem-solving abilities (Owen & Fuchs, 2002; Vitalone-Raccaro,
Numerous strategies have been found to be effective in improving the academic performance of students classified as learning disabled across a variety of subject areas (Brailsford, Snart & Das, 1984; Owen & Fuchs, 2002; Pfannenstiel, Bryant, Bryant & Porterfield, 2015; Schunk & Cox, 1986; Tournaki, 2003; Wilson & Sindelar, 1991). One such example is the use of a minimum addend strategy in which a student determines which is the larger addend and then, starting from the larger number, the student counts up by the smaller addend (Tournaki, 2003). In this study, 42 general education students and 42 students classified as learning disabled in second grade were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: minimum addend strategy, drill and practice, or control. Based on the results of pre- and post- single-digit addition assessments, as well as a novel transfer test, the researcher concluded that students classified as learning disabled improved significantly in the strategy condition, as compared to the drill and practice and control conditions. An even more encouraging finding is that students classified as learning disabled achieved accuracy similar to the accuracy of general education students when taught in the strategy condition. Thus, it seems that “strategy instruction can increase the problem-solving efficiency of students with LD to the point where they perform as efficiently as students without LD” (Tournaki, 2003, p. 455).

While there are many unique strategies such as the one described above, most of the strategies examined in the research can be categorized as advance organizers, mnemonic instruction, cognitive strategy instruction, and self-regulation. These strategies, which have proven to be effective in improving the comprehension, writing,
problem solving, and reasoning of students classified as learning disabled, are discussed below.

**Advance organizers.** Eleven studies suggest that teachers’ use of advance organizers to teach students classified as learning disabled leads to improved student achievement (Bulgren, Schumaker & Deshler, 1988; Darch & Carnine, 1986; Darch & Eaves, 1986; Darch & Gersten, 1986; DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Englert & Mariage, 1991; Griffin, Simmons & Kameenui, 1991; Horton & Lovitt, 1989; Horton, Lovitt & Bergerud, 1990; Lazarus, 1991; Lenz, Alley & Schumaker, 1987). Advance organizers, as developed and defined by Ausubel (1978), consist of material and information that is presented by the teacher in advance of the assigned learning task in order to help students organize new and often complex or difficult content. Material is presented at a high level of abstraction and generality, typically indicating relationships among the lesson’s key concepts and ideas. Although researchers have operationalized advance organizers in various ways in the literature (Lenz et al., 1987), research findings consistently demonstrate positive effects for many different types of advance organizers.

The findings of seven studies suggest that there are positive benefits for the use of concept diagrams, semantic feature analysis, study guides, story mapping, and visual spatial displays for students who are and are not classified as learning disabled (Boon, Paal, Hintz & Cornelius-Freyre, 2015; Bos & Anders, 1990; Bos, Anders, Filip & Jaffe, 1989; Bulgren et al., 1988; Darch & Carnine, 1986; Darch & Eaves, 1986; Horton & Lovitt, 1989). For example, Horton and Lovitt (1989) provided middle and high school students with a study guide consisting of 15 short-answer questions that referenced main
ideas from a specific text. Findings indicated that low performing students as well as students classified as learning disabled scored significantly higher on measures of reading comprehension in social studies and science when placed in the condition in which a study guide was used as an advance organizer, as opposed to a self-study condition. Similarly, advance organizers such as concept diagrams, in conjunction with concept instruction, led to significant gains on concept acquisition tests for 475 general education students and students classified as learning disabled in high school mainstream science classes (Bulgren et al., 1988). In fact, in two separate studies (Darch & Carnine, 1986; Darch & Eaves, 1986), Darch and his colleagues determined that students classified as learning disabled using visual spatial displays to learn social studies and science material outperformed their control group peers (who received information via text only) on a posttest measure of recall and comprehension.

These results suggest that various types of advance organizers not only benefit students classified as learning disabled, but they are advantageous for remedial and general education students as well. Additionally, findings indicate that advance organizers are effective for improving student recall and comprehension across a range of subject areas, including social studies, science, and health, as well as across a variety of grade levels. Finally, it seems that teachers can be taught how to use these advance organizers in a relatively short amount of time, and once implemented in their classrooms, they aid in student achievement. For example, in several of the studies, teachers were explicitly taught the targeted instructional intervention (Bulgren et al.,
1988; Lentz et al., 1987) and, in some instances, they were provided with instructional scripts (Darch & Carnine, 1986).

**Mnemonic instruction.** Mnemonic strategies are defined as devices or techniques that strengthen memory and recall of information (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2000), and these methods are typically classified as linguistic, spatial, visual, physical response, and verbal (Lubin & Polloway, 2016). For example, a linguistic mnemonic strategy includes the transformation of an unfamiliar word into an acoustically similar, more familiar keyword that is linked to an image that helps learners retrieve or recall correct information (Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks & Jacobson, 2004; Scruggs, Mastropieri, Levin & Gaffney, 1985; Veit, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1986). Some of the most commonly used mnemonic strategies include acronyms, acrostics, keywords, pegwords, and pictographs (Lubin & Polloway, 2016). The findings of 12 studies suggest that mnemonic instruction is another useful tool for enhancing the recall and retention of students classified as learning disabled in a variety of subject areas (Condus, Marshall & Miller, 1986; Fontana, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007; Graves & Levin, 1989; Mastropieri, Scruggs & Fulk, 1990; Mastropieri, Scruggs & Levin, 1987; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Levin, Gaffney & McLoone, 1985; McLoone, Scruggs, Mastropieri & Zucker, 1986; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1989; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992; Scruggs et al., 1985; Scruggs, Mastropieri, McLoone, Levin & Morrison, 1987; Veit et al., 1986). Except for two very recent meta-analyses (Kuder, 2017; Lubin & Polloway, 2016), much of the research on mnemonic instruction was conducted during the 1980’s and 1990’s. This work was focused primarily on students classified as learning disabled in grades 6 through 12, and
Mastropieri, Scruggs, and their colleagues were responsible for conducting the vast majority of this work. Only one study revealed that students classified as learning disabled did not perform better on immediate or delayed recall posttests under mnemonic, compared to direct instruction, conditions (Fontana et al., 2007).

With this one exception, the findings of these studies provide overwhelming evidence of the superiority of mnemonic instruction over traditional instructional approaches that use components of direct instruction such as drill and practice. For example, in a study by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1992), 19 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students classified as learning disabled received life science lessons through either mnemonic or traditional instruction in a within-subjects design. In the mnemonic condition, students were also taught to generate and draw their own mnemonic pictures. Student performance results on content acquisition were significantly higher for the mnemonic strategy compared to the traditional instruction condition, and this advantage was substantially greater for the delayed-recall scores. Perhaps most encouraging of all is the finding that students trained in mnemonic techniques were able to generate and apply their own mnemonic strategies to novel situations.

The benefits of mnemonic keyword instruction were also evident in a study designed to measure the vocabulary acquisition of 64 twelve-year-old students classified as learning disabled (Condus et al., 1986). In this study, students were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: keyword-image, picture context, sentence-experience context, or control. While all treatment groups significantly outperformed students in the control condition, the most noteworthy finding was that the keyword students
significantly outperformed students in all other conditions. Furthermore, only keyword students were able to maintain their high level of vocabulary achievement throughout an eight-week time period—once again highlighting the superiority of mnemonic techniques over other instructional methods.

**Cognitive strategy training.** A cognitive strategy, which is taught using explicit instruction, is a procedure that students can use to accomplish specific cognitive goals. The objective is for students to learn a specific strategy and then use it automatically and internalize it as a cognitive routine. Collaborative Strategic Reading techniques (Boardman, Vaughn, Buckley, Reutebuch, Roberts & Klinger, 2016) and morphemic vocabulary instruction (Brown, Lignugaris/Kraft & Forbush, 2016) are examples of two such strategies that improved students’ classified as learning disabled reading comprehension. Collaborative Strategic Reading is a multicomponent reading comprehension model that uses before, during, and after reading strategies to improve reading comprehension, and morphemic vocabulary instruction is an approach that requires students to isolate an unfamiliar word and separate it into small parts in order to derive its meaning. Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing (CSIW) is yet another example of a strategy that research suggests is effective in improving the written expression of students classified as learning disabled while also helping students gain responsibility for their own writing (Englert, Raphael & Anderson, 1992; Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony & Stevens, 1991; Hallenbeck, 2002). CSIW emphasizes the role of dialogue in writing development, the use of scaffolded instruction, and the transformation of solitary writing into a collaborative activity (Englert et al., 1991). In
one study (Englert et al., 1991), 128 general education and 55 students classified as learning disabled in grades four and five were assigned to either a CSIW intervention or a control condition. Instruction in CSIW consisted of four phases: text analysis, teacher modeling of the writing process, guided practice of writing strategies through collaborative practices, and students’ independent use of strategies. Students in the control group, on the other hand, participated in the district’s in-house writing program based on their language arts textbook. Based on an analysis of multiple variables, it was clear that students classified as learning disabled benefited when teachers made writing strategies visible to students during the writing process. Specifically, CSIW students (general education and students classified as learning disabled) achieved significantly greater metacognitive knowledge scores regarding the expository writing process and writing strategies compared to students in the control group. All students were also successful in generalizing their knowledge to less structured writing situations while simultaneously showing increased sensitivity to their audience. These findings suggest that students were able to employ self-regulation skills on familiar as well as novel writing tasks. Once again, similar to findings from other previously discussed studies (Tournaki, 2003), the performance of students classified as learning disabled no longer varied significantly from the performance of general education students after receiving the CSIW intervention.

Studies of cognitive skills instruction (CSI) in mathematics have produced similar results for the acquisition of problem solving skills, but maintenance and generalization effects have not been as pronounced (Montague, 1992; Montague & Bos, 1986). In two
studies (Montague, 1992; Montague & Bos, 1986), students classified as learning disabled scored significantly higher from baseline to posttest measures of problem solving after receiving CSI training in math. In Montague and Bos’s (1986) study, four out of six secondary students classified as learning disabled generalized their newly learned strategy from two-step to three-step math problems while three out of five middle school students classified as learning disabled in Montague’s (1992) study were able to generalize their skills across settings. However, the results for the maintenance of strategies were not as strong (Montague, 1992; Montague & Bos, 1986). Thus, the findings of these two studies suggest that CSI for mathematics is effective at improving the problem-solving abilities of students classified as learning disabled, but it is less effective at helping all students generalize and maintain their newly acquired strategies.

Self-regulation. Another large cluster of studies, 18 in total, has revealed that self-regulation, or self-monitoring, strategies are also effective at improving the academic performance of students classified as learning disabled (Case, Harris & Graham, 1992; Chalk, Hagan-Burke & Burke, 2005; Clark, Deshler, Schumaker, Alley & Warner, 1984; Danoff, Harris & Graham, 1993; De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz & Graham, 1997; Graham & Harris, 1989a; Graham & Harris, 1989b; Graham & MacArthur, 1988; Graham, MacArthur, Schwartz & Page-Voth, 1992; Graves, 1986; Graves & Levin, 1989; Klingner, Vaughn & Schumm, 1998; Malone & Mastropieri, 1992; Saddler, 2006; Sawyer, Graham & Harris, 1992; Sexton, Harris & Graham, 1998; Simmonds, 1990). Self-regulation strategies, such as goal setting, self-questioning, self-monitoring, and self-instruction, help learners become aware of their cognitive strengths and weaknesses while
also helping them regulate their performance on a given task (Montague, 2008). Findings further suggest that self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is particularly effective in writing instruction for adolescent students classified as learning disabled. In a study by Chalk and colleagues (2005), fifteen high school sophomores classified as learning disabled were taught a six-step procedure and self-regulatory techniques to determine their effectiveness in improving students’ world history essays. The SRSD intervention resulted in significant improvements in both the number of words written and the quality of writing (e.g., focus and development, organization, fluency, and conventions). Similar improvements in quality and essay length were also found in SRSD intervention studies examining the writing performance of second grade (Saddler, 2006) and seventh and eighth grade (DeLaPaz, 1999) students classified as learning disabled.

Research indicates that self-regulated strategy development is also effective at improving the mathematical problem-solving skills of students classified as learning disabled. In a study of four fifth and sixth grade students classified as learning disabled, Case and colleagues (1992) used SRSD to teach students a strategy for solving simple addition and subtraction word problems. As expected, students’ performance on addition word problems remained high while more impressive gains were evident on subtraction problems. The number of errors decreased, as students were less likely to choose the wrong mathematical operation. Montague’s (2008) review of research in strategy instruction in mathematical problem-solving further confirms that self-regulation strategies are indeed an evidence-based practice that can improve the mathematical skills of students classified as learning disabled. He argues that “self-regulation is integral to
cognitive strategy instruction as it directs and guides students in the application of the problem-solving process and is essential to effective and efficient mathematical problem solving” (Montague, 2008, p. 42).

The literature on instructional practices suggests that both direct instruction and strategy instruction have positive treatment effects and enrich the learning of students classified as learning disabled. Although very few studies focused exclusively on direct instruction strategies, findings from all three studies suggest that the explicit teaching of specific skills enhances student performance on measures of academic achievement in the area of reading (Darch & Kameenui, 1987; Pany & Jenkins, 1978; Pany, Jenkins & Schreck, 1982). Furthermore, the use of specific strategies, such as advance organizers, mnemonic instruction, cognitive strategy instruction, and self-regulation techniques are also shown to be effective interventions for improving the academic performance of students classified as learning disabled, as well as their general education peers, across a variety of content areas (e.g., Darch & Carnine, 1986; Englert et al., 1991; Saddler, 2006; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992). These results are consistent with the findings of ten literature reviews (Anderson, Yilmaz, & Wasburn-Moses, 2004; Gajria et al. 2007; Jitendra et al. 2004; Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Mason & Graham, 2008; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997; Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Graetz, 2003; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000).

The findings of three of the meta-analyses, all by Swanson and colleagues, suggest that while direct instruction and strategy instruction individually predict positive effects, the combination of these two instructional approaches actually increases the
magnitude of instructional outcomes (Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000). These results are based on an analysis of hundreds of studies conducted between 1963 and 1997. Thus, it seems that a combination of top-down and bottom-up instruction can also be an effective instructional approach when working with students classified as learning disabled. Each of the strategies discussed above operates differently depending upon the specific content area, educational setting, and lesson objective (Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998), so no one single approach should be implemented in all instances. These findings can help to positively shape general education inclusion teachers’ instructional practices when working with their included students.

Teacher-Student Relationships

The third section in the research review is centered on classroom climate and includes studies focused on teacher support, caring classrooms, responsive teaching, and classroom community (e.g., Kiefer, Ellerbrock & Alley, 2014; Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010; Patrick, Ryan & Kaplan, 2007; Sakiz, Pape & Hoy, 2012). The overarching theme that connects these topics is teacher-student relationships. High quality teacher-student relationships have long-term implications for students’ academic success (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre & Pianta, 2013; Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Wentzel, 1997), emotional well-being (Jiang 2013; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Suldo et al., 2009), level of school satisfaction (Jiang, Huebner & Siddall, 2013), and relationships with peers (Luckner & Pianta, 2011; Matsumura, Slater & Crosson, 2008; Mikami, Gregory, Allen, Pianta & Lun, 2011). Teacher-student interactions have the
potential to affect students in many ways. The studies included in this final section of the literature review are categorized into four themes: impact of teacher-student relationships on student achievement, motivation and engagement; defining and developing caring teacher-student relationships; impact of teacher-student relationships on student well-being; and impact of teacher-student relationships on peer relationships. Together, these studies illustrate the various ways that high quality teacher-student relationships positively affect middle school students.

**Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships on Student Achievement, Motivation and Engagement**

My literature search identified five studies that examined the influence of caring teacher relationships on students’ academic achievement, motivation, and engagement (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Ruzek et al., 2016; Smart, 2014; Wentzel, 1997; Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish & Russell, 2017). In four of these studies, students’ perceptions of teacher caring, rather than observers’ reports, were used as the focus of interest (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Smart, 2014; Wentzel, 1997; Wentzel et al., 2017). In each study, the concept of caring was defined differently by students and teachers and motivation was assessed in a variety of ways; yet, the outcomes of all studies in this group suggest that caring teacher-student relationships were associated with positive academic outcomes.

Murdock and Miller (2003) examined the relationship between 206 eighth-grade students’ achievement motivation in various subject areas and their perceptions of teacher caring. Teacher caring was conceptualized as interpersonal support, respect, and behaviors that exhibited a commitment to student learning while motivational variables
included student measures of academic self-efficacy, intrinsic valuing of education, and teacher-rated measures of student effort and persistence. The findings suggest that perceived teacher caring was positively associated with all three measures of achievement motivation, but it made the largest contribution to intrinsic valuing of education. Specifically, students who reported that their teachers cared for them viewed themselves as academically capable, and they also set higher educational goals for themselves. These results persisted even after controlling for prior motivation and the influence of parents and peers. More recent research, focused solely on the teaching of science, resulted in similar findings (Smart, 2014). In this study, sixth grade students who perceived their teachers as helpful, friendly, and understanding were more likely to report high efficacy as well as high task value for science (Smart, 2014). Thus, if student achievement is the desired goal of education, then teachers must be aware of the significant ways in which their interactions with students shape their motivation and self-efficacy.

Along with academic motivation, perceived teacher caring is also associated with the pursuit of social goals in the classroom (Wentzel, 1997). Based on a longitudinal study of 248 middle school students, Wentzel (1997) found that perceived caring from teachers was significantly and positively related to prosocial behavior scores in the area of cooperation, sharing, and helping others. Perceived teacher caring also positively influenced students’ social responsibility goals, such as following the teacher’s requests, and students’ academic effort including industriousness and school engagement. Students
also reported higher levels of internal control; that is, students expressed the belief that it was up to them to do well in school, and it was within their own control to do so.

One study found that outcomes of perceived teacher caring differed when data were examined at the individual (student) level compared to the classroom (student consensus) level. Like other studies, Wentzel and colleagues (2017) examined the relationship between teacher support and student motivation and engagement, but they also included peer support as an additional variable. Specifically, they measured 169 middle and 71 high school students’ perceptions of their teacher’s level of care and fondness for them, the degree to which teachers provided help and guidance, the teacher’s value for the subject matter, the teacher’s expectations for student helping behavior, and peer support—specifically, peer expectations for compliant and helping behavior and peer emotional support for academic tasks. In contrast to other studies (as discussed above), on the individual student level, teacher-related variables did not predict measures of academic self-efficacy or students’ internalized reasons for engaging in schoolwork; however, peer-related variables, including perceptions of peer support, did have a significant impact on student effort and mastery goal orientations. In contrast, at the classroom level, when large numbers of students perceived their teacher to be emotionally supportive and interested in the subject they were teaching, students reported high levels of internalized value for learning and academic effort. This suggests that, when large numbers of students perceive teachers similarly, the potential exists for the development of a positive classroom climate that supports motivation and engagement.

In sum, data analysis at both the individual and classroom levels suggested that middle
school students seem to be motivated and engaged if peer and teacher behavioral
expectations were communicated, if peer and teacher emotional supports were present,
and if the teacher demonstrated an interest in the subject being taught.

In contrast to the above set of studies, one study by Ruzek and colleagues (2016)
used independent observations rather than student reports to assess teacher caring. They
investigated whether the link between observed teacher emotional support and students’
reports of motivation and engagement outcomes could be explained by students’ mid-
year reports of classroom experiences. Coders scored teacher video recordings on
measures of positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for adolescent perspectives.
This sample of 605 middle school and 355 high school students’ mid-year reports
indicated that in emotionally-supportive classrooms, they had more experiences of
autonomy as well as more positive relationships with peers. They also reported increases
in their mastery motivation and behavioral engagement in these same classes. Teacher
emotional support did not, however, influence students’ competence beliefs. Overall,
students were more motivated and behaviorally-engaged in emotionally-supportive
classrooms in part because teachers provided them with opportunities to act
autonomously and engage in experiences that promoted positive peer relationships.

The majority of studies in this section used student perceptions, rather than
observations of teacher behavior, as the measure of teacher caring. Even though
adolescents’ perceptions of caregivers’ behavior were more powerful predictors of social
and emotional outcomes than reports from other informants (Feldman, Wentzel &
Gehring, 1989), the findings of all included studies suggest that teacher caring positively
influences student outcomes. In sum, the support of a caring teacher is a positive predictor of academic motivation (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Ruzek et al., 2016; Smart, 2014, Wentzel, 1997; Wentzel et al., 2017), classroom engagement (Ruzek et al, 2016; Wentzel, 1997; Wentzel et al., 2017), the pursuit of prosocial goals (Wentzel, 1997), and student self-efficacy beliefs (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Smart, 2014). Adolescent students may be motivated to learn and behave in a prosocial manner simply because their teachers care about them.

**Defining and Developing Caring Teacher-Student Relationships**

Four studies identified in this review investigated how caring relationships were defined, developed, and maintained (Alder, 2002; Bosworth, 1995; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe & Fite, 2014; Wentzel, 1997). Three of the studies examined the nature of caring teacher-student relationships from the students’ point of view (Alder, 2002; Bosworth, 1995; Wentzel, 1997), and one study focused on the teachers’ own perceptions of caring behaviors (Garza et al., 2014). This research, though limited to only four studies, provides insight into specific teacher behaviors that students and teachers believe demonstrate a caring demeanor.

Bosworth (1995) and Alder (2002) directly asked middle school students how they defined caring teacher behaviors—a methodology not employed by many researchers. Bosworth (1995) employed interview techniques to ascertain how more than 100 low and middle-income middle school students from rural, suburban, and urban areas described the characteristics of a caring teacher. In addition to individual interviews, the twelve seventh and eighth grade urban students in Alder’s (2002) study also participated
in focus groups which asked them to define what care means to them. In both studies, students perceived caring teachers as those who knew their students well academically and personally, communicated openly with them, and valued student individuality. Caring teachers held high expectations for student achievement and were success-oriented. They checked for student understanding, and were academically helpful. Students in Bosworth’s (1995) study further identified teacher tolerance and respect for students as additional indicators of caring behavior. Middle school students in both studies valued caring relationships with their teachers, and they were able to articulate clear definitions of this concept. Overall, students perceived caring teachers as those who were helpful, communicated classroom expectations, and took an interest in them as individuals.

Wentzel (1997) also asked middle school students to generate characteristics of teacher caring. She then analyzed their responses using a combination of dimensions of Nel Noddings’ effective caregiving (Smith, 2004, 2016) and characteristics of effective caregivers identified in the family socialization literature. Specifically, responses were analyzed with respect to modeling, democratic communication styles, expectations for behavior, rule setting, and nurturance. The responses of 375 eighth grade students from a suburban middle school indicated that caring teachers listened to them and treated them with fairness and respect, similar to the findings in the studies discussed above. The students also reported that caring teachers were interested in the subject matter they taught, recognized students’ individual academic as well as personal needs, checked student work, and provided constructive feedback. Whether student responses were
based on interviews (Alder, 2002; Bosworth, 1995), focus groups (Alder; 2002), or analyzed according to pre-set criteria (Wentzel, 1997), students expressed similar sentiments about the perceived ways in which teachers demonstrated care for their them.

Rather than asking students to define the characteristics of teacher caring, like the studies discussed above, a recent study examined the teachers’ perceptions of the behaviors they believed convey caring in middle school classrooms (Garza et al., 2014). Based on purposive sampling, four female suburban middle-school teachers were identified by building administrators as being compassionate and caring in their relationships with students. Each teacher participated in an individual interview as well as a classroom observation, and each submitted a written reflection about an incident that exemplified her caring demeanor. Like the perceptions of the students, teachers also expressed the importance of knowing students well on both an academic and a personal level. They stated that caring teachers communicate high expectations, monitor student progress, and individualize students’ learning. Unlike the students, though, teachers also identified fostering a sense of student belonging and attending to the physiological and safety needs of students as additional indicators of teacher caring. Even though students’ and teachers’ perceptions of caring behaviors differed slightly, this research provided valuable insight into several commonly shared beliefs about teacher caring.

Acknowledging the benefits of caring teacher-student relationships (Allen et al., 2013), two studies examined the ways in which teachers were able to create and sustain a community of care within their classrooms (Parker, 2016; Range, Carnes-Holt & Bruce, 2013). Parker (2016) conducted a case study of four middle and high school choral
teachers working with students from diverse backgrounds and varied school settings. Analysis of a set of semi-structured teacher interviews, individual student interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts revealed that teachers viewed their role as one of support and care. They created a community of care by fostering a sense of student belonging and acceptance while also developing a vision for their own choral programs. A science teacher in another study created a caring and effective science classroom environment through the implementation of a specific program—The Caring Community Teaching Model (CCTM) (Range et al., 2013). This program combined affective teaching practices and instructional techniques to meet the unique emotional and academic needs of middle school students. The teacher incorporated activities such as student choice, modeling appropriate behavior, and the use of praise and encouragement—activities that enhanced students’ belonging and helped them build positive, caring relationships. Whether implementing a specific programmatic approach (Range et al., 2013) or simply promoting one’s own affective approach to teaching (Parker, 2016), teachers in these studies were able to develop and sustain warm and caring classroom environments which enabled students to flourish and grow.

Clearly, these research findings suggest that students and teachers have similar perceptions of what constitutes teacher caring in the classroom. Even though the studies in this section were conducted in middle schools in a variety of geographic and socioeconomic settings, the major findings were consistent—caring teachers considered the individual needs of learners on an academic and personal level; they demonstrated helping behaviors towards students; and they listened to their students. The research also
identified strategies that teachers can use to create a classroom environment that is respectful and engaging (Parker, 2016; Range et al., 2013). Learning about students’ and teachers’ perceptions of caring behavior provides educators with a better understanding of how to develop more positive relationships with their own students.

**Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships on Student Well-Being**

Two studies in this review focused on the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on students’ social-emotional well-being rather than on their academic success (Jiang, 2013; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Suldo et al., 2009). Many middle school environments have been criticized for being too impersonal and causing students to feel a lack of connection to adult role models such as teachers (Davis, 2003). Thus, it is important to understand how supportive teacher-student relationships can influence adolescents’ emotional and mental health.

One study (Suldo et al., 2009) focused on the types of perceived teacher supports that were most strongly associated with middle school students’ reported sense of school satisfaction and well-being. Four-hundred-and-one middle school students in a suburban school completed several assessments of their own well-being: The Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale, The Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children, and The Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale. A subset of 50 students then participated in focus groups and were asked to clarify the types of teacher supports most related to their life satisfaction. Results suggested that students’ perceptions of teachers’ emotional and instrumental support were the factors that most influenced their subjective well-being. Specifically, students perceived teachers to be supportive when they connected with
students on an emotional level, treated them fairly, and encouraged them to ask questions. Instrumental support included teachers’ use of best-practice teaching strategies, providing time to help students master learning objectives, and offering help when needed. These outcomes highlight the central role that teacher support and the nature of teacher-student relationships play in students’ sense of school satisfaction.

A more recent study extended the research on students’ sense of well-being in school by examining the influence of parent and peer support in addition to teacher-related support (Jiang 2013). Five-hundred-forty-seven middle school students completed surveys of school social climate and school satisfaction in the fall and spring of the same school year, and results affirmed that all three sources of support influenced students’ self-reports of school satisfaction. While peer support significantly contributed to school satisfaction in the fall and family support contributed a significant amount of variance to school satisfaction in the spring, the support of the teacher accounted for the largest amount of variance at both points in time. These results underscore the powerful influence of teachers in middle school students’ lives and once again accentuate the importance of positive teacher-student relationships.

Middle school students spend a substantial amount of time at school, and their teachers are significant role models for them. The findings of this small subset of studies suggest that perceived teacher support leads to increased students’ school satisfaction and overall subjective well-being. Thus, to bolster the emotional and mental well-being of adolescents, it is essential to nurture supportive teacher-student relationships in middle school environments.
Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships on Peer Relationships

The findings of three recent studies indicate that the quality of teacher student relationships is also related to middle school students’ behavior toward one another (Matsumura et al., 2008; Mikami et al., 2011; Ruzek et al., 2016). Students in these studies were more respectful and supportive of one another and demonstrated more prosocial behaviors toward peers when they engaged in caring interactions with their teachers. Findings from one of the studies further revealed that a teacher professional development program led to improved observed positive peer interactions (Mikami et al., 2011). Together, these studies show the extent to which positive teacher-student relationships influence adolescents’ relationships with peers.

Matsumura and colleagues (2008) studied both instructional practices and the collaborative environments created by teachers to determine their influence on students’ behavior toward one another as well as the quality of students’ classroom participation. With a specific focus on teacher respect, the presence of classroom rules, and opportunities for students to participate in collaborative activities, the study’s findings indicated that teachers were respectful towards students and listened attentively to them in 73% of classroom observations. Explicit rules against bullying as well as disrespectful and hurtful behavior were posted in nearly 61% of observations, and students’ behavior toward one another was generally positive in the majority of observations. Posting explicit rules in the classroom for prosocial behavior significantly predicted the number of students who participated in whole-class discussions while the degree of respect teachers showed students significantly predicted how friendly and helpful students were.
toward one another. Another study similarly found that when teachers engaged with students in respectful and emotionally supportive ways, students reported that peers also interacted with them in a supportive and respectful manner (Ruzek et al., 2016). In general, peers listened to each other and got along with one another. The results of these two studies indicate that teachers are powerful models for students; more respectful teacher behavior was strongly associated with more positive interactions among adolescent students.

The first two studies in this section found that caring teacher practices influenced peer-to-peer interactions. The final investigation examined whether a teacher professional development intervention aimed at improving teacher-student relationships would ultimately result in enhanced peer-to-peer relationships (Ruzek et al., 2016). The program—My Teaching Partner – Secondary (MTP-S)—trained teachers to be emotionally supportive and warm in their interactions with students and to provide cognitively engaging and challenging instruction. After a year-long intervention, middle and high school students in MTP-S classrooms reported no change in the nature of their relationships with peers, yet researchers observed improved positive peer interactions from the fall baseline data collection to the spring data collection. Observed peer interactions remained the same in control classrooms. These results suggest that teachers who have warm relationships with their students can encourage peers to see the positive traits of their classmates, thus leading to more respectful peer interactions.

Given the positive associations between caring and supportive teacher-student relationships and student outcomes, enhancing school-based relationships appears to be a
beneficial way to improve students’ academic success, social-emotional well-being, and peer-to-peer interactions. This assertion is supported by six research reviews conducted in the past 15 years focused on teacher-student relationships (Davis, 2003; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Quin, 2017; Roorda, Koomen, Split & Oort, 2011; Wentzel, 2003; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Four of these reviews were centered on the associations between teacher-student relationships and student achievement, student motivation, student engagement, and student sense of belonging across a wide range of grade levels (Davis, 2003; Quin, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011; Wentzel, 2003). The findings of these reviews reinforced the importance of positive teacher-student relationships as well as the classroom climate that teachers create. For example, higher quality teacher-student relationships and positive classroom climate were found to be associated with higher levels of student engagement (Davis, 2003; Quin, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011), improved academic grades (Davis, 2003; Quin, 2017; Roorda et al., 2011), enhanced mental health and social-emotional functioning (Murray & Pianta, 2007), and lower levels of disruptive behavior (Davis, 2003; Quin, 2017; Wentzel, 2003). While these results were found across all grade levels, some findings further suggested that teacher-student relationships are even more critical for the academic success of older, adolescent students as well as those with learning difficulties (Roorda et al., 2011). In fact, Murray and Pianta (2007) stressed the fact that students with high-incidence disabilities, such as students classified with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, and mild mental retardation, were in greater need of direct teacher support. These students are at a heightened risk of experiencing academic, social, and emotional difficulties, and thus,
teachers who create a safe classroom environment, communicate with their students in an open and honest manner, demonstrate interest in their students’ lives, and explicitly convey classroom rules and routines can significantly impact students’ overall success and well-being. Together, this research extends our current understanding of the high degree of influence that teacher-student relationships have on adolescents’ academic, social, and emotional outcomes, and more particularly for students classified as learning disabled.

Discussion

The findings of this review present a complex picture of general education teachers’ beliefs about inclusion and the challenges they face in implementing inclusive practices in their own classrooms. The studies highlight stark differences in teachers’ beliefs about the concept of inclusion, about the students with identified needs in their classes, and about factors that influence their self-efficacy. It is clear that general education teachers hold mixed beliefs about the abilities of students with identified needs. Recent studies have found that teachers’ express mostly positive beliefs about students with identified needs (Harding & Darling, 2003; Robinson, 2002; van Hover & Yeager, 2003), in contrast to the primarily negative beliefs expressed by teachers in a study conducted nearly 20 years earlier (Zigmond et al., 1985). While this appears to be an encouraging finding, a great deal of tension still exists between teachers’ broad support of inclusion in theory and the difficulties implementing it in practice (e.g., DeSimone, 2006a; Hersman & Hodge, 2010).
The review suggests that, regardless of grade level or gender, teachers’ beliefs toward inclusion depend upon the severity of the student’s disability, administrative support, collegial collaboration, and a teacher’s level of preparation in working with students with identified needs. Time and again, teachers in these studies expressed a need for professional development in inclusive pedagogy and behavior management strategies (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006a; Hersman & Hodge, 2010; Smith & Smith 2000). Furthermore, researchers found that general education teachers rarely implemented meaningful instructional strategies in their classrooms, primarily due to their lack of knowledge (e.g., van Hover & Yeager, 2003; Combs et al., 2010). They also found, however, that general education teachers believed that participation in pre-service field-based experiences working with students with identified needs as well as intensive, subject-specific in-service professional development would help them master the skills required to implement inclusion and better meet the needs of their included students.

Findings of these studies further indicate that few general education teachers, regardless of grade level, believed strongly in making adaptations for their students with identified needs (e.g., Olson et al., 1997; Robinson, 2002; van Hover & Yeager, 2003). Some general education teachers reported using one or two strategies to address the needs of their included students, and while these teachers were well intentioned, the implemented strategies were superficial at best. These studies also affirm that, although teachers believed in the importance of specific practices, the feasibility of implementing
the adaptations was low, thus resulting in a disconnect between teacher beliefs and inclusive classroom practices.

The studies reviewed identify a range of instructional practices that have been found to lead to the increased academic achievement of students classified as learning disabled. Findings from a small body of literature found that direct instruction led to significantly stronger student performance in the areas of reading and vocabulary acquisition. A more robust set of studies showed that strategy instruction is effective in improving the comprehension, writing, problem-solving, and reasoning abilities of students classified as learning disabled (e.g., Boardman et al., 2016; Montague, 2008; Tournaki, 2003). These strategies include the implementation of advance organizers, mnemonic instruction, cognitive strategy instruction, and self-regulation techniques. While these findings are encouraging, the literature also indicates that, in reality, very few general education teachers implement such strategies in their daily instruction (Schumm et al., 1994).

The studies regarding teacher-student relationships do, however, present some promising results. Research findings indicate that teachers who create a supportive classroom climate through the development of warm and caring relationships with students can positively influence adolescents’ academic performance, social and emotional well-being, and interactions with peers. In study after study, students with supportive teachers reported higher self-efficacy beliefs (Murdock & Miller, 2003; Smart, 2014), improved school engagement (Ruzek et al, 2016; Wentzel, 1997; Wentzel et al., 2017), and a greater sense of school satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2013). They identified
caring teachers as those who help students, consider their individual needs, treat them with respect, listen to them, and take an interest in their lives. Given this strong influence teachers have on their students, it is essential for teachers to understand how they can improve the climate in their classrooms so students can meet with the highest degree of success. While the results of these studies can indeed provide suggestions for ways to accomplish this, the literature review did not address how willing teachers are to actually spend time developing these supportive classroom climates.

The reviewed research offers many insights into general education teachers’ beliefs about inclusion as well as those instructional practices that lead to improved academic success for students classified as SLD. The research also provides student and teacher perceptions of caring and the influence of teacher-student relationships on student outcomes. Yet there is still a great deal to learn. While research has identified effective strategies for teaching students classified as SLD, it does not specifically examine the instructional practices used by recognized successful general education inclusion teachers. With the exception of two studies (Olson et al., 1997; Smith & Smith, 2000), the research also does not differentiate between the beliefs of teachers who are deemed successful compared to those who are not. Research in this area is needed to shed light on what successful general education inclusion teachers believe about inclusion, what instructional practices they employ in their inclusive classrooms, whether they nurture supportive teacher-student relationships, and whether they view disability from an ableist or DSE perspective.
Moreover, there are methodological concerns about the research included in this review. The majority of studies included in this review used surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to determine teacher beliefs about inclusion and perceptions of teacher caring. This reliance on self-reports may affect the validity of the results, thus suggesting a need for research that incorporates observational methods of data collection. Another concern rests in the lack of consistency in how the construct and model of inclusion is defined across studies. Clear definitions are essential for a full understanding of the work of inclusion teachers across the many different types of settings implied by the construct of inclusion. Finally, it is imperative that future research in this area concentrate on a single-teacher inclusion model—a model frequently used in U.S. schools. Research in such a context is notably absent, thus leaving a gap in the empirical literature.

Insights from such research would provide a better understanding of the current challenges facing general education inclusion teachers so that educators can begin improving pre-service and in-service education. Indeed, awareness of the specific knowledge and preparation that teachers desire and need can inform educators at all levels so that pre-service coursework and professional development opportunities can be tailored to meet the needs of general education teachers working in inclusive settings. Research shows that both the affective and academic aspects of instructional practice contribute to student success, and negative beliefs about inclusion can prevent general education teachers from including students with identified needs as valued and fully participating members of their classrooms. Furthermore, even when teachers believe that inclusion is beneficial, they question the practical implications of inclusion given their
perceived challenges in implementing this practice. Since students with identified needs now spend large amounts of time learning in inclusive settings, their academic success rests heavily on the learning environment and expertise of general education teachers. Thus, it is essential to understand how successful inclusion teachers in a single-teacher context create classrooms that enable their students classified as SLD meet with success. Results of such research can then be used to improve inclusive practices and provide a more equitable education for all students.
Chapter Three

Research Methods

My main purpose in designing this study was to gain insight into the beliefs and practices of identified successful general education inclusion teachers working with students classified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD). Because beliefs can influence teacher practice, it was critical that I not only gather data from the teacher participants themselves, but also observe teacher participants in their single-teacher model inclusive classrooms. Thus, I examined actions and practices in which teachers engaged in their classrooms in addition to analyzing their responses to interviews and to a survey. Considering this purpose, and given the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspective I assumed, my research question was:

How do successful middle school general education inclusion teachers create classrooms that enable their students classified as having a Specific Learning Disability to succeed?

Methodological Approach: Case Study

Because answering the research question involves understanding the complex nature of general education inclusion teachers’ beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom climate, I used a case study design for this research. “Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). A case study design thus allowed for the in-depth exploration of a unique issue as it occurred in a real-life context. In the study, I sought to identify successful teachers’ beliefs and practices as well as the classroom climate they created in
working with students with identified needs in order to build knowledge for better preparing general education teachers to work in inclusive settings. By collecting multiple types of data about each of the case study participants—data from observations of the teachers in the authentic context of the classrooms, interviews, and a survey—I was able to create rich portraits of them as teachers and, in particular, of their beliefs, practices, and the inclusive classroom environments they created.

**Setting and Participants**

This study focused on the beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom climates of two general educators who were identified as successful in inclusive middle school classrooms. The interviews and observations took place in general education classrooms in a middle school setting in a large suburban school district in northern New Jersey. The district included two middle schools, both of which served students in grades 6 through 8. Oak Ridge Middle School\(^2\) had a student population of approximately 650 students including 135 students with identified needs. Fair Meadow Middle School, the smaller of the two schools, served approximately 450 students including 115 students with identified needs. Each building housed a variety of special education programs including self-contained classes, resource center replacement, and mainstream settings with and without the support of a paraprofessional. A co-teaching model—a model in which a general education and a special education teacher assume equal responsibility for instruction—was not implemented in either building as a way to offer in-class support for classified students. This district traditionally has one of the highest, if not the highest,\(^2\) All names of people and places in the dissertation are pseudonyms.
classification rates in the county; approximately 22% of all enrolled students were classified at the time of this study. Males accounted for more than double the number of females who were classified, and the highest classification category was Other Health Impaired\(^3\) followed by Specific Learning Disability, which accounted for approximately 19% of all classified students.

I presented my study’s parameters to the Superintendent and was granted permission to conduct my research in the district’s two middle schools. I spoke with the two building principals and answered any questions they had about my study. Once I received their approval, I began the process of identifying the participants using purposeful reputational case sampling. According to Patton (1990), “The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 169). Moreover, reputational case sampling limits the variation of the participants and, instead, focuses on the participants’ similarities (Patton, 1990). This sampling method is appropriate when researchers do not have the necessary knowledge to choose a sample, so they select participants based on the recommendation of “experts” or “key informants” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

For this study, I emailed key informants in each middle school—including school administrators, district supervisors, child study team members, and special education teachers—and asked them to nominate middle school general education inclusion teachers who they deemed were successful in working with students classified as SLD.

\(^{3}\text{Other Health Impaired includes chronic or acute health problems such as, but not limited to, asthma, attention deficit disorder, diabetes, and hemophilia.}\)
Other researchers (e.g., Bartelheim & Evans, 1993; Cooper, 2003; Larson & Silverman, 2005; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994; Stough & Palmer, 2003; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley & Hampston, 1998) have used similar methods to select participants who best met their criteria for achieving their research objectives. I received 13 nominations for teachers in Oak Ridge Middle School and eight nominations for teachers in Fair Meadow Middle School. From those nominated, I selected the two teachers who met the following criteria:

- They had the largest number of nominations by school personnel in each building.
- They taught in a single-teacher classroom model rather than in a co-teaching context.
- They currently had students classified as SLD in their classrooms.

These criteria, or boundaries (Simons, 2009), framed the current study in order to keep the investigation focused on the research question. Since this study was not focused on any particular subject matter, I hoped to identify a sample of teachers from across multiple content areas. Unexpectedly, the two teachers who received the greatest number of nominations were both teachers of Social Studies.

Rachel, a seventh grade Social Studies teacher at Oak Ridge Middle School, received a total of five nominations from a combination of special education teachers, Child Study Team members, and administrators. When asked why they believed she was successful working with students classified as SLD, they stated that she was innovative, creative, and fun as she differentiated her lessons to meet the individual needs of her
students. They stressed the way she consistently sought advice and guidance from special education staff in order to better understand and instruct her students with identified needs. They further described her as positive, warm, and approachable, and as a caring teacher who related well to her students and listened to their concerns.

At the time of the study, Rachel had 16 years of teaching experience and had earned a master’s degree plus 30 additional credits. She had taken two college courses directly focused on special education topics and had participated in approximately five in-service opportunities during her career. Despite this level of education, though, she stated that most of what she knows about teaching students with identified needs was learned on the job. Rachel also explained that her instructional practices were influenced by her own experiences as a child. For example, because she had a medical issue as an adolescent, she understood how it felt to be different, and she always kept this in mind when interacting with students with identified needs. She told me that her parents would not allow her to use her medical condition as an excuse to give up in school and in life; instead, she was told to put in extra effort and seek help from others, if needed. Many of her immediate family members worked in public service professions, and she reported that she constantly witnessed acts of service and was encouraged to always help others. She mentioned two high school teachers who inspired her with their humor, the unconventional projects they assigned, and their ability to get students to work together. Finally, she explained how her own experiences with high school theater productions greatly influenced the instructional activities she implemented in her classes.
The second participant, Patrick, also taught seventh grade Social Studies. He worked in Fair Meadow Middle School and received two nominations—one from a special education teacher and another from a Child Study Team member. He was the only general education teacher from Fair Meadow who received multiple nominations. Colleagues stated that he is committed to working with included students and is the favored teacher of these students. Indeed, because he uses multiple modalities and is able to engage students in his lessons, all seventh-grade students with identified needs are placed into his classes. Colleagues emphasized his character, his commitment to students with identified needs, and his passion for the teaching profession.

Patrick had 18 years of teaching experience at the time of the study, yet he recalled participating in only a few in-service workshops focused on special education topics during this time. He did not take any undergraduate courses in special education, but he did receive a 30-credit master’s degree in Developmental Disabilities as well as an additional master’s degree in Educational Administration. He learned about classroom management and the nature of the various disabilities in his Developmental Disabilities master’s degree program, but he was unable to identify additional coursework that he took while enrolled in this program. Like Rachel, Patrick reported that undergraduate coursework did not prepare him to work in inclusive classrooms; instead, he learned about inclusion through his experiences on the job and conversations with colleagues. He also credited his family with helping him become successful in his career as an inclusion teacher. He told me that he was raised well, and that he has a supportive family. He also
explained that he has three children of his own, so he observes how they learn and that helps him in his work.

In terms of class composition, Rachel had four students with identified needs in the class of 23 students that I observed. Only one of these students, however, was classified as SLD; the remaining students were classified Other Health Impaired, Autistic, and Communication Impaired. This class was supported by a paraprofessional. Patrick’s class had a total of 21 students which included five students with identified needs. Two students were classified as SLD, one as Other Health Impaired, another as Communication Impaired, and the remaining student only received speech services. His class was also supported by a paraprofessional.

Data Collection

Case study research is characterized by the use of multiple data sources such as interviews, observations, video data, field notes, and self-reports (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009). The use of multiple data sources adds depth to data analysis and enhances data credibility. Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that each data source is like an individual puzzle piece; as they converge in the analysis process, “this convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (p. 554). The primary sources of data for this study were individual interviews, direct observations, and a belief survey. Classroom artifacts and a researcher log also served as secondary sources of data and were used to provide additional perspectives and insight into the data analysis.
I conducted the participant nomination process in December 2015 and conducted the rest of the study in the winter and spring of 2016. First, in early January 2016, I gathered demographic information about the participants, such as years teaching, educational background, and participation in training activities focused on the field of special education. This information was collected in conjunction with the participants’ responses to a belief survey. I interviewed each participant three times, and I observed them on eight separate occasions. I observed Rachel’s third period class and Patrick’s first period class on three consecutive days in February, three consecutive days in early March, and two consecutive days in late March. All interviews and observations were conducted between January and early June of 2016.

Interviews. According to Merriam (2009), “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 88). In order to gain insight into teachers’ beliefs and perspectives on their teaching practices, I used semi-structured interviews as a primary data source. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to present common questions to both participants, yet still gave me the flexibility to ask disparate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses (Merriam, 2009). I developed an interview guide for each round of interviews consisting of just a few pre-determined questions in order to check my understandings and impressions from prior interviews and observations as well as to ask common questions focused on my research question. I included potential probes in the guide, but also asked follow-up questions as needed throughout the interviews. I developed each guide as the study progressed and as I became more familiar with the
participants and their contexts. This allowed me to react and respond to the teachers’ actions and thoughts presented in interviews and observations, rather than approach these from a pre-determined perspective. However, each interview had a thematic focus as well as potential topics for further examination (see Table I for interview focus).

Specifically, I conducted the first interview of each teacher prior to the start of classroom observations, the second interview after the initial set of observations, and the third interview after the completion of the third and final set of classroom observations. Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty-five minutes and focused on eliciting the teachers’ beliefs about inclusion as well as their perspectives about their instructional practices. The interviews also provided the teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences working with students classified as SLD as well as the classroom environments they created.

Table 1

Focus and Probes for Participant Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Focus</th>
<th>Potential probes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview 1:</td>
<td>- Reasons for nomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of inclusion teacher</td>
<td>- Description of classroom work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Changes in practices over time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview 2:</td>
<td>- Greatest success working with student classified as SLD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successes and challenges as SLD</td>
<td>- Greatest challenge working with student classified as SLD</td>
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<td>as an inclusion teacher</td>
<td>- Clarification of classroom observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview 3:</td>
<td>- Classroom communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Path to success</td>
<td>- Personal influences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Professional influences</td>
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Specifically, in interview one, I inquired about the teachers’ role in an inclusive classroom. I was interested in finding out what they did well in this role and how they became successful. In interview two, I asked teachers about their challenges and successes working with students classified as SLD in an inclusive setting. I also discussed with participants my preliminary analysis of prior interviews and observations in order to solicit feedback on my interpretations of their words and actions. According to Merriam (2009), during this type of member checking, “participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p. 217). Finally, I utilized the third interview to ascertain what aspects of the teachers’ experiences have been most important in helping them become effective in working with students classified as SLD. I continued to employ member checking techniques by asking teachers to reflect on my preliminary conclusions about their beliefs, instructional practices regarding inclusion, and the classroom climate they cultivated (see Appendix A for interview guides). I audio-recorded all teacher interviews with a digital recording device, and I later transcribed all of these.

**Observations.** The use of observations in this study provided “rich description” for my analysis and also acted as a cross-check of interview data (Simons, 2009, p. 55). I observed each teacher eight times over a two-month period, and each classroom observation lasted for one full 42-minute class period. My position during each visit was that of observer; I did not participate in class activities. During each observation, I took detailed field notes about the classroom context, the classroom teachers’ instructional practices, interactions between teachers and students, and teachers’ behaviors as they
related to the learning of students classified as SLD. I tried to capture the words of both teachers and students verbatim as much as possible. Furthermore, I documented my personal impressions and added reflective questions and comments in the margins of my field notes.

**Survey.** After exploring various surveys relevant to my research question, I decided to use the *Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey (2000)* to survey teachers’ beliefs about the practice of inclusion as well as their beliefs about their own role and comfort level working with included students with identified needs. This survey was administered to teacher participants at the beginning of the data collection cycle, prior to any interviews or observations. The answers to the survey questions were used to probe more deeply into teachers’ beliefs and practices during later interviews (see Appendix B for survey).

The *Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey* required individuals to indicate their level of agreement on 25 statements using a four point Likert scale comprised of the following response choices—*Yes, I agree; Sometimes; No, I don’t agree;* and *I just don’t know.* The survey was developed by the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (MCIE) in 2000. Initially, the survey was used in approximately 15 schools and was revised in 2002 based on user feedback. As of March 2008, the survey had been administered in an additional 30 schools, and it was determined that no further revisions were necessary. Carol Quirk, the Co-Executive Director of MCIE, sent me an email granting permission to use the survey (see Appendix C for email). She indicated that no validity studies have been conducted. However, because the survey has been
administered to a large number of teachers, has been revised based on its first administration in 2002, has been used extensively as a self-assessment tool, and addresses the questions I am seeking to answer in my study, I believe it is an appropriate instrument.

The first five survey items were focused on teachers’ beliefs about inclusion, and the next five questions were concerned with teachers’ beliefs about their role in the inclusion process. The subsequent five questions assessed teachers’ beliefs about their school’s inclusive practices while the final ten questions were focused on the teachers’ personal comfort and skill level in including students with identified needs in their classrooms. Responses to the 25 survey items were coded and divided into the four belief categories identified above. I examined the individual statement scores as well as the mean score for each category of related statements. Higher scores indicated greater agreement with the statement(s), and thus more positive attitudes toward inclusion while lower scores indicated less agreement with the statement(s).

This survey instrument included the items eliciting simple demographic information. I expanded this section to include additional demographic information such as number of years teaching, number of special education courses taken in the participants’ teacher preparation programs, and number and types of in-service professional development opportunities in which the teachers had participated. The original survey also included three open-ended questions. The first two questions asked teachers to identify the easiest and most difficult students to include in general education classrooms while the third question invited respondents to share any additional
comments. I removed these questions from the survey because the first two were not relevant to the focus of my study, and the participants had multiple opportunities to share other comments with me during the interview process. Specifically, during the interview process, I probed some of their answers to the belief survey questions for clarification purposes or to illuminate apparent contradictions between observed actions, survey answers, and/or interview discussions.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts can contribute to a deeper understanding of participants’ beliefs and instructional practices, and I gathered these throughout the study when appropriate. For example, I collected various handouts such as Do Now assignments, advance organizers, reading passages, exit slips, project outlines and instructions, and assessment papers, as supporting documentation for the data analysis process. These artifacts contributed to my understanding of the teachers’ classroom practices.

**Researcher notes.** Throughout the data collection process, I documented my feelings, impressions, reactions, questions, and speculations about my research. I recorded these personal reflections in the margins of my interview and observation notes as well as in a research journal, in which I wrote after each interview and observation. I also made periodic notes as I coded my data. These notes served as a record of my research process, and further allowed me to engage in preliminary data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in order to allow me to stay focused on the research question and to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the volume of data that accumulates during the research process (Merriam, 2009). During my review of
my observation notes and during the interview transcription process, I jotted down notes, comments, and questions in the margins about anything that struck me as potentially useful for answering my research questions. I then read all the documents (observation notes, interview transcripts, other documents) multiple times and highlighted the recurring and related themes in each document each time I read through them. Through that process, I identified initial themes from the data. I also compared participants’ survey and interview responses to my observation notes to identify consistencies and inconsistencies between teachers’ professed beliefs and their observed instructional practices. These insights, along with my research journal, aided me in the construction and refinement of themes, or recurring patterns. As themes were identified, I constantly compared them to newly collected data and revised and refined them several times to reflect this new information. Additionally, throughout the data collection and data analysis phase, I met periodically with my advisor as well as with a Critical Friend, a fellow doctoral student, in order to ascertain if my initial findings seemed plausible.

I first followed this data analysis process to analyze each case individually—i.e., to conduct a within-case analysis. I collected and analyzed data for each individual teacher in order to identify each teacher’s beliefs, practices, and classroom climate as thoroughly as possible. When appropriate, I also examined the data to determine the participants’ views of disability in relation to a DSE perspective. Once each case study was completed, I then conducted a cross-case analysis to “build abstractions” across cases (Merriam, 2009, p. 204) and identify commonalities and differences among the participants.
Trustworthiness

As in any research, it was important that I carry out this study in a rigorous and ethical manner. Research findings must “ring true” to both readers and researchers alike, and I addressed this by focusing on issues of trustworthiness. These included concerns for the credibility and consistency of the study’s findings (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009).

To increase the credibility of my findings, and ensure the research findings accurately depicted the reality of the phenomenon being studied, I employed several strategies. First, I used multiple data sources—surveys, interviews, observations, and other relevant documents—to examine and understand the beliefs and practices of identified successful inclusion teachers. This triangulation of multiple data sources provided a means of cross-checking participants’ responses. For example, I checked what a teacher told me in an interview against what I observed in the classroom. Additionally, credibility was strengthened through the use of member-checking, or respondent validation. In my study, participants were given multiple opportunities to verify, challenge, and refine my perspective of their narrative during informal and formal interview sessions. At the same time, I was vigilant in referring back to my notes and transcripts to ensure that the participants’ requests for changes were not contradicted by the data collected. Finally, using a peer review strategy, I met on an almost weekly basis with my Critical Friend who examined my work and assessed whether the raw data and my resulting findings seemed credible. Together, we reviewed belief survey, interview, and observation data, and discussed my initial thoughts about emerging themes. I shared
my researcher notes, as well, in order to provide a fuller picture of my impressions. I also asked my advisor and other members of my dissertation committee to scrutinize my work throughout the dissertation process in order to provide constructive feedback and challenge assumptions and biases that may be present in my study. My researcher notes and reflective commentary further served to help me understand and subsequently reduce possible personal bias. My researcher notes also provided an audit trail of the methods and procedures used throughout the research process.

Several of the strategies described above, including triangulation, the audit trail, and peer review, also improved the consistency of my study—that is, the dependability of the results and the extent to which the study’s findings are in concert with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). In other words, given the collected data, do the results make sense? For example, Rachel expressed the importance of helping students with identified needs feel comfortable participating in her class (Rachel, Interview 2), and I observed her efforts to include them in class activities such as Student Theater presentations during Observations 1 and 1a.

**Positionality of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection and data analysis (Simons, 2009). Thus, a researcher’s own personal views, values, and biases inevitably influence the research process and interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, in order to ensure the integrity of the study, it was essential that I identify my position and situate myself in this research process.
During the time of this study, I served as Assistant Superintendent of Education in the school district in which the study was conducted, but I continued to identify closely with my original role as a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom. As a special education teacher in an urban district for nine years, I was committed to providing my students with every opportunity to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. I believe all students—regardless of their sources of diversity—deserve a high quality, rigorous education that challenges and encourages them to achieve success. Unfortunately, though, I often witnessed inequities in the resources, materials, and opportunities afforded to students with identified needs as compared to general education students. For example, my students did not have books, materials, and other necessary resources for all of their subjects. Many general education teachers possessed scant knowledge of how to modify their instruction and make accommodations for included students even though they would have liked to do so. Other teachers chose to ignore and dismiss their responsibilities toward students with identified needs—or they simply tolerated them in their classrooms. In these instances, students with identified needs were viewed as a burden, and they became marginalized within the included classroom. Furthermore, my students were often forgotten when field trips and other special events were planned. Basically, teachers, administration, and staff members did not consider students with identified needs when making decisions that impacted the school.

Because of these early experiences, I have been a staunch advocate for students with identified needs during my 20 years working as a school administrator. In my current school district, nearly 23% of the student population is classified and eligible for
special services. Thus, the number of students with identified needs being educated in mainstream classrooms is staggering. As an administrator, I have participated in IEP meetings, have advocated for students to receive the services to which they were entitled, and have created opportunities for general education teachers to work with special educators to learn about ways to better accommodate students in their classrooms. While I believe that the general education teachers in my current district have a much more positive outlook toward included students than teachers in my prior district, I also believe that some teachers are more effective than others when working with these included students. It is these teachers I am most interested in studying—general education teachers who are regarded as being successful working in inclusive classroom settings.

Also, as part of my reflection on my own positionality, I needed to be cognizant of the professional role that I held within the research setting—that of Assistant Superintendent of Education. In this role, some of my primary responsibilities included oversight of professional development, curriculum and instruction, and assessment. I also managed the teacher evaluation system, although I did not typically conduct formal individual teacher evaluations; I only observed and evaluated teachers who were rated partially effective or ineffective. Since my study was focused on identified successful teachers, I did not anticipate the need for me to formally observe any of the nominated teacher participants—thus removing my responsibility for their performance evaluation. It was essential, though, that I remained aware of how the teacher participants might perceive my position of authority. Therefore, I emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary and would in no way have any bearing on their performance evaluation. I
ensured participants that their names would not be disclosed, and I would maintain confidentiality throughout the entire research process. I also informed them that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

My professional position within the research setting, as well my personal experiences in the field of education, required me to be vigilant about being reflective and also about understanding my positionality. Writing frequent reflections throughout the research process allowed me to do this while also helping to maintain the integrity of the study. Sharing my preliminary thoughts and findings with my peers and dissertation committee members also helped me identify ways my own experiences and expectations might be influencing my interpretations of my data.

I recognize that my professional experiences inform my positionality, and it is these experiences that motivated me to conduct the study. My concern for the quality of the education received by students with identified needs inspired me to examine the beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom climate of identified successful general education inclusion teachers. Since research findings suggest that beliefs are likely to influence behaviors in the classroom (Kagan, 1992), it is necessary to change general education teachers’ beliefs about the nature of disability. Teachers must reject the notion that disability is a pathological, innate attribution of an individual and instead understand that ability and disability are socially and culturally constructed. Simply changing the location where students with identified needs are educated is not beneficial if general education teachers persist in defining disability as a deficit. According to Rioux and Pinto (2010), this “makes a charade of inclusion. Being ‘in’ a classroom, but not an
integrated and equal participant in the very fabric of learning contradicts the purpose of schooling” (p. 622). However, by redefining how disability is conceptualized, teachers can begin to challenge the existing structures in schools that marginalize and oppress students with identified needs. Perhaps then, students with identified needs can truly receive a socially just and equitable education.

In this study, I analyzed each case individually, and I also conducted a cross-case analysis. However, I do not present the findings of my study in this manner—thus, departing from a traditional case study format. Rather than present an individual case study for each teacher, I report the findings in a thematic fashion according to the themes of beliefs, instructional practices, and teacher-student relationships. I did this because my goal was to more fully understand how the two teachers addressed these very well-documented aspects of good teaching in their inclusion classrooms. When relevant, I address the perspective of the participants’ views of disability through the lens of DSE, and I further comment on the nature of teacher-student relationships from a Relational Cultural Theory perspective. These thematic findings are discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Then, in Chapter Seven, I discuss key ideas that emerged from these findings, make recommendations for teacher practice, provide implications for future research, and end with recommendations for policy makers.
Chapter Four

Teacher Belief Findings

In the context of my research, I use the construct of beliefs to include teacher attitudes and perceptions—concepts that typically necessitate a person’s judgment regarding whether or not something is true (Pajares, 1992). Throughout my interviews with Rachel and Patrick, I questioned them about their beliefs regarding inclusion because these are likely to influence their behaviors in the classroom (Kagan, 1992). In this chapter, I examine the teachers’ beliefs about the students classified as SLD in their inclusion classrooms. Specifically, I discuss their belief that their included students are capable and contributing class members. Next, I discuss the multi-faceted role of an inclusion teacher, challenges to inclusion, and the value of collaboration. Finally, I discuss the teachers’ belief about their need to ‘learn on the job’.

Capable and Contributing Class Members

Rachel and Patrick both expressed overwhelmingly positive views of the students classified as SLD included in their classrooms. They expressed the belief that these students are capable and contributing members of their classes. In my second interview with Rachel, she acknowledged that students classified as SLD have challenges, but she encouraged students to “work around them” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 121). She said students can either “sit and cry” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 127) or confront their challenges and make their “path more comfortable” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 130). She articulated the importance of students facing their problems rather than making excuses because that is a “life skill” that helps them be successful in high school and beyond.
Rachel’s statements reflected her belief that students classified as SLD can help themselves adapt to their challenges and meet with success in their academic endeavors. Indeed, her words seemed to suggest that students classified as SLD should have a positive attitude instead of feeling defeated.

Rachel further expressed her belief that students classified as SLD can also contribute to the learning of others. In fact, according to her affirmative response on the *Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey*, she indicated that “students without disabilities can benefit when a student with a significant disability is included in the class” (Question 4). During Interview 3, I asked Rachel to explain her thoughts behind this response, and she answered:

> Everyone has their strengths in certain areas like the kid that has certain disabilities can’t write out a paragraph. Verbally, he can tell you, but he can’t write it, but can draw it in a collage or something like that. And if they’re paired up with somebody that can write a lot, well then now they’re learning . . . and they can just feed off of each other. So, I think based on their skills that they have, and their strengths, that’s how they can feed off of each other. They can learn from each other (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 452-459).

Rachel reiterated this belief later in the same interview when she stated, “You can learn from them no matter what the person may be able to do” (Rachel, Interview 3, line 494). She did acknowledge that students’ maturity level in the seventh grade can oftentimes interfere with their ability to see these positive differences in one another, so she often
took it upon herself to emphasize and call attention to the strengths of individual students—especially those classified as SLD.

Patrick and Rachel expressed surprisingly similar sentiments about students classified as SLD. Like Rachel, Patrick stated that while these students have challenges, they are quite capable of overcoming them. In Interview 2, I asked Patrick to tell me about a time he believed he was successful working with a student classified as SLD. He told me a story about one specific student, and he relayed a conversation he had with him. He said to the student, “You’ve got a disability. You’ve got stuff going on at home. We’ve got that. That’s always going to be there. But, you know what? You can do something about it. Let’s go” (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 330-332). This interaction between teacher and student reflected Patrick’s beliefs that students classified as SLD are capable of achieving academic success. He specifically stated in Interview 1 that “special ed students need to know that they feel that they are capable of achieving it” (Patrick, Interview, line 586). Patrick said that they “have so much to offer” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 130), and it is his responsibility to identify and implement strategies that allow these students to be active participants in the classroom.

Similar to Rachel’s convictions, Patrick also expressed the belief that students classified as SLD can make valuable contributions to classroom instruction. He indicated the highest level of agreement regarding the statement, “Students who have disabilities can be positive contributors to general education classes” on the Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey (Question 2). When I asked him to expand on his response, he said:
Every student has something to add, but even the students with disabilities—I don’t want to say even more so—but I see their journey. I see them come so much further. So, from September to June, the kid with the SLD, the kid that has an IEP, that has a behavior issue, that has a learning disability, I want that kid to come in and shine a little more. But, saying they’re contributors in class, totally.

(Patrick, Interview 3, line 454-458).

Patrick explained that he wants all students to contribute in class, not because he waters down the curriculum, but because he offers strategies such as graphic organizers to assist students who need them. He also expressed his belief that students classified as SLD can contribute to the teacher’s learning as much as to the general education students’ learning.

I think everyone’s got something to add, and I think at the end of the year, I want to make sure that they all got something out of the class, but they got something from me. I got something from them. And it was kind of this reciprocal environment where they’ve learned, but they also added to learning. They brought something to the table (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 639-643).

Thus, as the above discussion indicates, both Rachel and Patrick believed their included students classified as SLD are capable, contributing members of their classrooms. They expressed the belief that general education students can benefit and learn from students with identified needs. They did not disregard the students’ impairments nor did they allow the students to use them as an excuse to be defeated. Instead, they acknowledged and accepted the students’ differences as part of human
diversity and provided them with opportunities to be fully participating and valued members of their classes.

Multi-Faceted Role of the Teacher

Rachel and Patrick worked with students classified as SLD in a single-teacher model of inclusion, and they expressed comparable beliefs about what inclusion means to them. Rachel commented that “inclusive means they’re part of the classroom. They’re not just a body. They’re part of the lesson” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 347-348). Patrick expressed similar sentiments when he told me, “They need to feel part of the group, and I think that is the great part of inclusion that I’ve noticed over the past few years, which is why I went for special ed—because I love inclusion, and I want every kid in the lesson” (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 636-639). Throughout the interview process, they expressed their convictions that inclusion, by definition, is a classroom environment that includes and embraces all students—including those with identified needs. Both also articulated their beliefs that, as inclusion teachers, they must teach more than Social Studies facts; supporting the acquisition of specific academic skills and nurturing the social-emotional well-being of included students are also critical responsibilities. In fact, Rachel stated that it is a “priority” for her to give students time in class to work through troubling social situations (Rachel, Interview 1, line 72). She told me that some of her students with identified needs experienced difficulty with social situations, and in those instances, she offered her guidance. In Interview 2, Rachel said, “I think in terms of being included, it doesn’t necessarily mean for their academic level. It’s more towards their social, being comfortable level” (Rachel, Interview 2, line 20-21). As an inclusion teacher, she
believes it is her job to make students feel comfortable raising their hands, offering an answer, or asking for help; she believes her job responsibilities extend beyond the academic realm.

In addition, Rachel also expressed the belief that she needs to help students classified as SLD to feel confident in her classroom. On several occasions during our interviews, she used phrases such as, “feel confident that you’re making the right decision and you’re trying your best” (Rachel, Interview 3, 515) and “feel confident no matter what level they are” (Rachel, Interview 3, line 725). She conveyed the importance of providing opportunities for students to try in her classroom—to feel comfortable and confident asking questions of her and the other students. Ultimately, Rachel believed she must “make them feel like it’s their class. They’re not just here in a room with some other people. I want them to feel ownership—which is hard. I want them to own the class. I tell them it’s not my room. It’s our room” (Rachel, Interview 3, line 435-438). She explained that while it is her responsibility to teach students something about Social Studies, it is often more important that she help students feel truly included in her classroom. Rachel implemented several strategies to accomplish this.

Because Rachel felt different when she was a student, she told me she believes it is her duty as an inclusion teacher to address and be sensitive to student differences in her classroom. To accomplish this, she puts a great deal of forethought into her lessons. She stated:

I always think of like how would that kid feel? What is the best way I can make him blend in? He knows he’s different or she knows she’s different. She knows
she’s got issues. She knows, you know, she’s got a lot of acne or she can’t read out loud but how can I at least make her feel like she can or someone think that she can? So, I always have that way of thinking (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 109-114).

She reiterated this philosophy again in Interview 3 when she said, “I know with any activity or any expectation, I want to make sure first, will this kid be able to do it? Would that be fair? I try to think of all that first” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 338-340).

She then incorporated specific strategies into her lessons to address her included students’ needs. For example, in her Student Theater, Rachel included roles such as rocks or trees for students who wanted to be part of the play, but were hesitant to speak. She told me she included both large and small roles to address a variety of students’ comfort levels (Rachel, Interview 2). In other efforts to make students feel included, Rachel used silent signals. When certain students needed assistance, and were too timid to ask for it, she instructed them to place a post-it or a pencil in a specific place on their desks to quietly notify her (Rachel, Interview 1). Rachel recognized her students’ needs, and she went out of her way not to make these needs obvious to others. Her primary goal was to respectfully include her students classified as SLD in the activities of her classroom without making them “stand out in a negative way” (Rachel, Interview 3, line 844).

Patrick also voiced his own belief that he must support students classified as SLD to “come out of their comfort zone” and become active members of the class (Patrick, Interview 1, line 635). He wanted them to know they were capable of participating in his lessons and learning the material. Like Rachel, he believed it was less important for him
to teach students specific Social Studies content. He explained that students can simply Google this information or “ask Siri” (Patrick, Interview 1, line 629). Instead, he stressed the belief that, as an inclusion teacher, he must help students “learn traits to be successful. They need to learn how to find information. They need to learn how to research. They need to know how to stand in front of a room and speak. They need to know how to work in a peer group” (Patrick, Interview 1, line 632-634). Patrick admitted that part of his role is to teach content, but he also believed he was responsible for teaching specific skills while presenting Social Studies facts; this is even more meaningful for students’ future success.

In Interview 2, I asked Patrick what strategies he used to enact this responsibility and successfully enable his students classified as SLD master the skills and knowledge presented in his lessons. His answer was very similar to Rachel’s response. He told me:

In the back of my mind—because I teach Social Studies—I know I get such a heavy dose of special ed in my class, and it runs the gamut of disabilities, so to me, that’s always in the back of my head. I always have to think how is that kid with a disability going to receive this lesson and what do I do better to get them—not so much master it, but level the playing field for that kid (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 183-188).

He anticipated how particular students would receive his lessons. He also expressed the necessity of knowing “the student you’re teaching” and then choosing an instructional approach that fits the needs of the students (Patrick, Interview 2, line 25). He told me, “If I can’t relate pedagogically to my students and deliver it . . . then I have no business
being in front of that room—especially at a middle school level” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 421-423). Patrick further believed it was his duty to establish a positive rapport with his students and be a positive role model if he hoped to be successful in his role as an inclusion teacher (Patrick, Interview 3). He stated that it was his responsibility to ensure that students classified as SLD mastered the lesson’s objectives, and “that’s one way I would say it’s more inclusive—is that everyone seems to benefit from everything we do. And they don’t feel as if they’re excluded” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 482-484). He summarized his role as an inclusion teacher with the words, “You gotta reach every kid. You gotta reach every kid” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 307).

Rachel and Patrick believed their role as inclusion teachers was multi-faceted and included a focus on academic as well as social-emotional objectives. Both agreed they were responsible for teaching Social Studies content, but it was not their top priority. Instead, Patrick believed his principal obligation was to help students acquire academic skills while Rachel believed her primary role was to nurture students’ feelings of confidence and comfort. Most importantly, they both believed it was critical for them to promote a sense of ownership and belonging in the students classified as SLD in their inclusive classrooms.

**Multiple Challenges**

Rachel and Patrick expressed positive views of the practice of inclusion as well as of the included students in their classes. Despite their overall affirmative perspective, however, they also spoke about the multiple challenges they believed they faced as inclusion teachers. They identified personnel support, school structures, and the students’
disabilities themselves as potential obstacles to their success. In this section, I discuss their frustrations with each of these as well as their beliefs about ways in which they can address these challenges.

On multiple occasions during our interviews, Rachel acknowledged her dissatisfaction with the level of support provided for her in her inclusive classroom. Reflecting on prior years of teaching, she said, “We always had either a special ed teacher with me . . . or a certified teacher who is an ancillary (a part-time certified teacher). Now, you get, oh, you have a para” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 55-57). She expressed great frustration that these paraprofessionals were not always trained for their positions; they have often never worked in an educational setting, and they were not very engaged in the lesson’s activities. She told me that the paraprofessionals believed their job was to “make sure they (students) write down their homework . . . but there’s no academic support behind that. Like help with modifications” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 59-60). She explained that class sizes have increased over the years, and having an untrained paraprofessional in the room was not at all beneficial. In fact, it made her feel like she had another student in the room—not the support of a competent adult (Rachel, Interview 3). Without this support, she often felt like she was ignoring certain students because, try as she might, she was unable to give individual attention to each student.

Later in the interview, Rachel shared with me that there were indeed times in the past that she had effective paraprofessionals in her room. These paraprofessionals were adept at keeping students focused and engaged, and they were also skilled with disciplinary concerns (Rachel, Interview 3). However, because these paraprofessionals
were so effective, the building principal often removed them from her Social Studies classroom the following year and placed them into Mathematics or English Language Arts classes. Rachel believed this was done because the principal placed greater importance on these PARCC tested subjects. Even when afforded an effective paraprofessional, however, no time was made available for them to collaborate either prior to or after class. She explained, “They really don’t have one period off. They’ve gotta go. It’s a race. They gotta go to the next class to the next class, so there’s no meeting time with me saying, hey, this works with this kid or this didn’t” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 117-120). Thus, she resorted to passing notes to her paraprofessionals in order to ‘speak’ with them about classroom issues. Furthermore, substitutes were not consistently provided when the paraprofessionals were absent. She expressed her frustration about this by commenting, “It’s not fair to the kids. I’m an adult. I can handle myself. It’s not fair to them” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 146-147).

Patrick articulated similar concerns about the personnel support in his classroom. When I asked him about this, he acknowledged that he usually had either a paraprofessional or a certified ancillary teacher in his inclusion classes. These individuals tended to rotate classes often, so there was not a great deal of continuity from year to year. He also confirmed, “I don’t usually get ancillaries anymore. I get a para” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 113-114). He believed the use of paraprofessionals rather than ancillary support was challenging because he could no longer “divide and conquer” the students’ needs (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 116-117). Paraprofessionals were not allowed to work alone with students in a separate classroom, so he was forced to abandon
his preferred team teaching approach as a means to address the needs of his students classified as SLD. He also protested, “I don’t get time to collaborate with her. She literally just shows up. And I only see her period 1. I don’t work with her the rest of the day. So, she literally shows up two minutes before class starts” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 188-190). Since Patrick knew his paraprofessional quite well, though, he was able to use text messaging as a means of communication. Through these messages, he was able to convey the aim and student expectations for the next day’s lesson.

Despite these challenges, Patrick told me that he is fortunate to be working with his current paraprofessional. He told me “she’s awesome” (Patrick, Interview 3, line 170), and he relies heavily on her because she checks students’ agendas, assists with technology issues, provides students with resources and materials, and assists them individually with projects and assignments. He articulated his belief that “you don’t want her to just be the person who walks around and tells them to write something in their agenda. She should be a go-to person, and she is” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 205-206). The challenge, though, was meeting the needs of all students when he was assigned a weak support person with whom he could not develop an effective working partnership. He expressed the need for an effective in-class support person, as well as strong colleagues, office administration, and Child Study Team members who would ideally work together toward the same goals for students.

Patrick also believed that school structures, such as master schedules, presented challenges to his successful practice of inclusion. At the beginning of his career, for instance, he was assigned to two different schools within the district. When he
experienced difficulties working with students classified as SLD, he sought help and guidance from his mentor, but that was not successful. He shared:

I literally would see my mentor when I walked in. He was off the periods when I was teaching. So, he’d say, hey, do you need anything? He’d walk out. I’d walk into his classroom. I’d never see him . . . So, it was almost impossible to just be like, oh, my God. I need some help (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 550-554).

He believed that common preparation time between novice teachers and their mentors would address the need for a better support system. He commented further on the topic of common planning time when he discussed his desire to return to the true middle school model of ‘teaming’. Patrick explained to me:

It used to be more of a team approach. It still is. It’s a lot harder now with scheduling. So, I would have the same cohort of students as my colleagues, and then at team meetings, we could talk and discuss how you would approach a student—especially a kid with disabilities. We’d have meetings. We’d be able to meet with Child Study. We’d have common time. So, instead of me just meeting with someone from Child Study to discuss an IEP on an SLD student, it would be five or six of us meeting, and we could kind of tackle the problem together (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 23-28).

Rachel echoed these same sentiments when I asked her how we could open up the lines of communication between staff members in order to improve the inclusion process. She answered, “ . . . maybe having more common time—not with just your department, but common time with who has the same students. Because the focus is how do you make
students succeed” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 406-408). Both expressed the belief that the lack of team time is a challenge to their success as inclusion teachers.

Patrick identified the students’ disabilities themselves as another challenge to the inclusion process. He acknowledged that each student with identified needs is unique, and he therefore is unable to assume a “one size fits all” approach with his instructional techniques (Patrick, Interview 1, line 156). He told me that he changed his instructional strategies for each student depending on their individual needs. He stated:

You’re constantly matching—mixing and matching with the student, and the ultimate thing is success for the student . . . you’re also trying to make sure that the kid is constantly growing. The technique—you see I like that part—I think that part is the fun part—is to constantly come up with strategies to get the kids to learn in a different way. And I think the kids’ disabilities, in a way, challenges me to do that (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 165-170).

He reiterated similar beliefs in the second and third interviews, as well. He explained that addressing individual student needs was especially challenging during his initial years of teaching, and he used to blame himself for his “personal weakness” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 584) in not being able to “reach everyone” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 573). As he gained experience, however, Patrick believed this challenge still existed but it was easier for him to manage. He articulated, “I keep saying this, but you give me five kids with SLD, and I’ve got five totally different students. It’s not one size fits all, so to me, that’s very challenging. And I think the good thing is with experience, that comes”
(Patrick, Interview 3, lines 44-47). Each year of experience working with students classified as SLD enabled him to more effectively address the needs of his students.

In sum, Rachel and Patrick voiced their concerns about the challenge of employing paraprofessionals in their classrooms, rather than fully certified teachers, to help support their included students classified as SLD. They claimed that having an additional adult ‘body’ in the room was not beneficial unless that individual was trained and capable of providing academic support to the students. The lack of consistent support personnel from year to year, as well as the lack of substitute coverage during their absences, also contributed to their challenges. Additionally, both expressed dissatisfaction with the elimination of common team time from their schedules. They believed that this structured planning time would enable them to speak with their colleagues about their included students so they could identify the most effective methods for teaching these students. The literature supports the need for this structured time between special and general education teachers (Titone, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Unlike Rachel, Patrick further identified the ever-changing nature of the students and their identified disabilities as a challenge to his success as an inclusion teacher. He indicated that he has to constantly learn and grow as a professional in order to successfully address his students’ needs.

**The Value of Collaboration**

As indicated in the section above, Rachel and Patrick possessed strong beliefs about the significance of collaboration between teachers who shared the same group of students. Specifically, they expressed their belief in the importance of scheduling time to
meet with colleagues in order to discuss explicit skills and strategies that were effective when working with students with identified needs. Since team time was not currently being used in their school district, they provided me with other examples of ways that they collaborated with and learned from their colleagues. I present these discussions in this section.

Rachel indicated the highest level of agreement to the statement, “Our school’s administration would support teachers working together to include students with disabilities” on the Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey (Question 12). When I referenced this question during Interview 3, she affirmed her answer and also provided additional insight into her belief. She explained that the hectic nature of her daily responsibilities sometimes prevented her from appreciating the true supportive nature of her school environment; yet, she was truly grateful for the support of her colleagues. She described how lucky she was that her classroom was located immediately next door to the Child Study Team office so she could easily stop in and obtain guidance and advice about particular students. She also admitted that she did this often. In Interview 2, she shared another story about her collaboration with her colleagues in the Language Arts department. When her students were struggling with a writing assignment in her class, Rachel asked each Language Arts teacher to describe the way students were taught to write a thesis statement. She then used a slightly modified version of this method in her Social Studies class so that there was some continuity of instruction for the students. She explained that this type of collaboration was especially beneficial for the included
students in her class and that it was part of the school’s culture. Rachel stated that she was very comfortable seeking the help of others, and she told me:

It’s always been pretty much very open with each other and helping each other. So, if you’re stuck with something or with a kid with a disability, I feel like I can openly go to someone and say, hey. And I think I’m confident enough to admit that I don’t know something. I need help (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 592-596).

She did not feel this way, though, early in her teaching career. Rather, at that time, she believed she needed to know and do everything herself. However, after several years, she came to realize that she, and all teachers, were more successful when they relied on one another. She clearly expressed the belief that teachers learn a great deal from each other when they ask for help and collaborate.

Patrick’s statements to me about collaboration were strikingly similar to Rachel’s views. He also verbalized his lack of knowledge about students with identified needs during his early years of teaching as well as his hesitancy to seek the assistance of his colleagues (Patrick, Interview 1). He eventually learned to collaborate and depend on others for guidance, and he subsequently witnessed improvements in his ability to instruct his included students. He admitted that when “you have five people pulling in the same direction with the same cohort of kids, that is a huge benefit—especially when you have to address a problem” (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 212-214). Thus, he learned to appreciate the support provided by those around him—namely, teachers, Child Study Team members, administrators, and guidance counselors. He also included parents as
important members of this collaborative team. Patrick further explained these beliefs when he stated:

I think if you’re in an environment where you’re all by yourself and you close that door, I think that lends itself to some weaknesses and problems, too. If I want to be a really strong teacher, I need a support staff (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 192-195).

Like Rachel, Patrick was not afraid to seek the help of his colleagues because he believed this practice only made him a more effective teacher.

Teaming and collaboration are key variables for the successful implementation of inclusive education (Titone, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2003). Rachel’s and Patrick’s expressed beliefs reflected this view, and neither was hesitant to collaborate with colleagues for the benefit of their included students with identified needs. This was not true earlier in their careers, but they both came to realize the value of such collaboration. They both identified fellow teachers and Child Study Team members as key support personnel while Patrick also included administrators, guidance counselors, and parents as part of the collaborative team. In sum, Rachel and Patrick believed in the value of collaborative opportunities between educators because they promoted a common goal of academic success for students with identified needs placed in inclusive classrooms.

**Learning on the Job**

Researchers have reported that general education inclusion teachers have identified a lack of training in inclusion practices as a barrier to effective inclusion instruction (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Manset & Semmel, 1997). Rachel and Patrick
echoed these perceptions often during our conversations. Both told me that they did not believe their teacher preparation programs or subsequent in-service workshops adequately equipped them with the skills and knowledge needed to teach students with identified needs. In this section, I discuss their beliefs about their lack of preparedness to teach in an inclusive setting and their subsequent need to learn on the job.

In Interview 1, I asked Rachel if she took any courses or workshops that influenced the way she taught students with identified needs, and her response was, “In terms of courses, maybe little aspects here and there. But, there’s been, unfortunately, nothing major that stands out in my head” (lines 817-818). She told me that some of her courses taught her about the theoretical basis of differentiation (Rachel, Interview 2) as well as the different types of learners and learning styles (Rachel, Interview 3). However, aside from learning a few generic methods of differentiation, such as taking one answer choice away on a multiple-choice assessment or giving students with identified needs extra time, she did not learn specific strategies for instructing her included students. Rachel believed that her college courses did not teach her “how to get the information in their head” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 758-759); rather, she told me, “It depends where you go, but most college classes, you learn on the job” (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 250-251). She further explained that she preferred to teach herself how to address her students’ various needs by researching relevant topics on the internet rather than taking formal courses or attending workshops.
Patrick also expressed his belief that he was ill-prepared to work with included students, as well as his need to learn about inclusion from his own professional experiences. In Interview 1, he shared:

Because I was a general ed teacher, and I still am, they didn’t prepare you in college. They didn’t tell you that oh, by the way, if you teach this subject, you’re going to get a heavy dose of special ed students with little to no background (lines 349-352).

When I probed further and asked him to identify the most useful information about inclusion that he learned throughout his bachelor’s degree and two master’s degree programs, he struggled to produce an answer. He responded:

That’s tough. There’s gotta be some critical information that I learned during master’s theories that I directly implement into my class . . . I don’t know if there’s one huge moment . . . a take-away. I’m sure there is, but I’m not . . .

(Patrick, Interview 1, lines 541-556).

He only mentioned learning about classroom management and the descriptions of various disability classifications; there was no indication that he learned anything about instructional techniques or strategies for working in an inclusion classroom. Essentially, he told me that learning about special education was “kinda like trial and error. You just had to figure it out” (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 378-379). Like Rachel, his own experiences as an inclusion teacher, in addition to the research he conducted on how to best accommodate his included students’ needs, were the things that best prepared him to teach in an inclusion setting.
Both Rachel and Patrick believed that their formal teacher preparation programs did not sufficiently prepare them to teach their included students classified as SLD. In fact, they were unable to identify any significant, meaningful course work or in-service training pertaining to this topic. At best, the themes they mentioned were only superficially related to the topic of inclusion, and it did not appear that specific instructional strategies were addressed in their college courses. Researchers have confirmed that new teachers need intensive pedagogical preparation if they are to be successful working with the diverse students in their inclusive classrooms (Deshler et al., 2001; Grskovic and Trzcinka, 2011; Titone, 2005), and yet, Rachel and Patrick received very little to no such training. According to these teachers, their actual work and experiences on the job enabled them to be successful teaching in an inclusion setting.

Discussion

As the findings reported in this chapter indicate, Rachel and Patrick expressed predominantly positive beliefs about inclusion and the students classified as SLD included in their classrooms. They described their included students as valued and contributing members of their classes who, in their words, deserved to feel a sense of true ownership and belonging. Additionally, both teachers emphasized that academic skills rather than specific content, as well as the students’ social-emotional well-being, were the primary goals of their inclusive classrooms. Their comments, though, were not entirely positive as they also articulated the challenges they faced as inclusion teachers. Both believed the employment of paraprofessionals rather than fully certified teachers often diminished the level of support students classified as SLD received in their classrooms.
They further believed that the lack of consistency in support personnel as well as the lack of substitute coverage presented additional challenges to their success. Finally, both believed that the loss of structured planning time, coupled with the absence of special education coursework in college, exacerbated their challenges as inclusion teachers. Overall, Rachel and Patrick expressed affirming beliefs about the practice of inclusion, and they also conveyed distinctly positive views of students classified as SLD.
Chapter Five

Instructional Practice Findings

Students classified as specific learning disabled often lack the necessary skills and strategies to process information in an efficient manner (Gersten et al., 2001). Nonetheless, research has shown that a range of instructional strategies have led to improved academic achievement for these students (Montague, 2008; Swanson, 1999; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000). The findings of various studies suggest that advance organizers (e.g., Englert & Mariage, 1991), self-regulation techniques (e.g., Chalk et al., 2005) and components of direct instruction and strategy instruction (e.g., Swanson, 2001) can enhance the learning of students classified as SLD.

In this chapter, I discuss the participants’ use of components related to direct instruction and strategic instruction as well as practices of differentiation, multisensory techniques, making instruction relevant to students’ lives, and analogies.

Direct Instruction and Strategy Instruction

Individual instructional practices are typically categorized according to two primary models of instruction—direct instruction and strategy instruction (Kuder, 2017). Direct instruction is a bottom-up process focused on the acquisition of specific skills; it is fast-paced, progresses in small steps, and provides frequent review of new material (Montague, 2008; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998). Strategic instruction, on the other hand, is a top-down process that provides students with specific strategies and rules for learning (Swanson, 2001; Swanson & Sachse-Lee, 2000). While both approaches have been successful in improving the achievement of students classified as SLD, the combined
implementation of these approaches results in higher academic achievement than either approach alone (Swanson, 2001; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998). This section will present data regarding the participants’ use of the components of both direct and strategic instructional practices.

The participants’ observed lessons contained many of the components common to both direct and strategic instruction, including daily reviews, statements of instructional objectives, guided practice, independent practice, and formative evaluations. While the data revealed that most of these components were indeed implemented in the teachers’ lessons, each teacher tended to favor some components over others. Rachel emphasized the use of daily reviews of material whereas Patrick focused on providing students with a statement of the lesson’s objective. Both teachers offered students some opportunities to engage in guided, as well as independent, practice while the teachers’ incorporation of formative assessments was not as clearly evident.

Rachel consistently reviewed content with her students—a practice documented in seven of the eight observed lessons through her use of a “Tweet Me” activity. As students entered the room, a “Tweet Me” message was posted on the SMART Board. In observation two, Rachel posted, “Tell me the following about the triangular trade: 1.) Where did it occur? 2.) Who and what was traded? 3.) Who did most of the capturing?” Students took out individual post-its, wrote down their answers, and posted their answers on a Twitter chart at the back of the room. Rachel then reviewed students’ answers—commenting on their responses and reinforcing content from the previous day’s lessons. These tweets often focused on lower level recall questions, but at times, more thought-
provoking questions were asked—for example: “Do you believe this statement is something Montesquieu would agree with? . . . To make new government, in whatever way, seems most likely to make them safe and happy. That’s it . . . yes or no” (Rachel, Observation 3a). This Twitter question sparked an in-depth conversation regarding the current content being taught—the Enlightenment thinkers. This technique took only a few minutes at the beginning of each class, yet it effectively engaged students in a review of previously learned material—a practice that can lead to improved academic achievement for students classified as SLD (Swanson, 1998). In my first interview with Rachel, I asked her about the activities I might see happening in her classroom, and she told me about the Twitter activity:

So, it’s like a Do Now, but it’s very funny because if I asked them the same question and asked them to write it on lined paper and expand upon it or whatever, it would take them forever to get started to do it. But, because it’s a little pretty piece of sticky paper, they do it right away (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 1030-1034).

Rachel’s comment reflects her belief in the effectiveness of this Twitter activity.

The statement of the lesson’s objective is another component of both direct and strategic instruction. Lesson objectives are explicit statements that clearly express what students will be able to do as a result of a specific learning activity; it is not the learning activity itself. Rachel did not employ this practice in her daily teaching. She often told students what they would be doing each day in class—the tasks and activities in which they would engage—but not the objective or aim of her instruction. In Observation 1a,
Rachel told the students, “What did I say we would do today? Right, get ready for the Art Gallery.” In Observation 2, Rachel stated, “As promised, you finished your first viewing of the Zaption Slave Trade video . . . we will watch it again . . . then, we will move onto another activity.” Similar statements about upcoming tasks were evident in four additional observations (Observations 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a). As illustrated above, Rachel outlined student assignments, but did not articulate the skills and knowledge that she wanted students to acquire.

Similarly, Rachel did not often provide students with the chance to practice newly learned material through guided practice. In a guided practice situation, students typically work on their own or with other students to practice newly presented content and demonstrate the knowledge they have already mastered. I observed Rachel employ guided practice opportunities only once during my eight observations. Specifically, in Observation 1b, students in Rachel’s class participated in a Gallery Walk project focused on explorers of America. Each student previously researched an explorer and created a poster depicting key information about that explorer. During the observation, students worked in pairs and asked each other questions about the other’s explorer. As two students with identified needs struggled to construct their answers, Rachel offered them support and guidance by asking them probing questions. In five other observations, however, Rachel spent the majority of class time focused on the explicit delivery of content, mainly through teacher-directed activities. For instance, in Observation 2, Rachel told students, “So, I am going to doodle my notes with you. I am going to tell you that you need to draw this, make a picture of this, but put your own style on it.” I also
observed this direct transmission of materials and directions in the subsequent two lessons as Rachel completed teaching the same ‘doodling’ activity (Observations 2a, 2b).

Rachel did, however, provide students with some opportunities for independent practice of newly learned content. Although I did not observe any examples of students actively engaged in independent practice during Rachel’s lessons, she did reference three such instances in my observations. In Observation 2, Rachel reminded students to complete the Trade Slave Form on the class’s website so she could ascertain how much the students learned. She also assigned students a multiple-choice task for homework in the following day’s lesson, stating, “Let me talk to you about your homework. Let me show you the form you need to fill out . . . you can use your doodles. But, if you don’t want to, and you want to test yourself, remember that it is graded—like everything else” (Observation 2b). Rachel assigned yet another independent homework assignment focused on the Enlightenment in Observation 3. Students were required to identify Enlightenment thinkers’ ideas found in the Declaration of Independence and document these on a chart provided by the teacher. In each case, students were required to complete the tasks independently without the assistance of the teacher.

The use of formative evaluations, or formative assessments, is the final common component of direct instruction and strategic instruction that will be discussed in this section. Formative evaluations are conducted during the instructional process to monitor student learning and to help teachers adjust teaching and learning activities, if necessary. Rachel used an assessment during Observation 2. In this lesson, Rachel showed students a video about the Slave Trade using Zaption, an online interactive video tool.
Periodically throughout the video, students were presented with questions to assess their knowledge and understanding. Students responded to these questions on a separate piece of paper, which they later handed in to the teacher. Additionally, in Interview 1, Rachel explained her use of the “Tweet Me” activity (described earlier in this section). While I previously discussed the observed Twitter activities as a method for reviewing material learned in prior lessons, Rachel told me that she also uses this practice as an informal quick assessment. She said, “Sometimes, I use them as a pop quiz, so it could be like what we did the day before—an assessment for it. So, they’re used in a variety of ways” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 1043-1045). Although Rachel claimed to use these Tweets as assessments, an analysis of the seven Twitter tasks did not provide definitive evidence that these were used as formative evaluations since there was no evidence that Rachel adjusted her instruction based on the assessment results. However, while I did not observe Rachel making any obvious modifications to her teaching as a result of the Zaption video, I never had a follow-up discussion with her to confirm whether she did or did not do so.

While Patrick implemented many of the same instructional components as Rachel—namely, guided practice, independent practice, and formative assessment—his approach and emphasis differed from hers. In contrast to Rachel, Patrick did not begin his lessons with a review of what was previously learned, as Rachel did. Instead, he started each observed class by focusing on upcoming academic content and writing the aim of the day’s lesson on the front white board. He documented the current date and listed the activities in which the students would participate that day. For example, in
Observation 2, Patrick wrote the following lesson objective and follow-up activities on the board:

**Aim:** What was the lasting impact of Enlightenment thinkers on the World?

1. Enlightenment Thinkers Gallery Walk
2. Complete all stations
3. Work on Picture Activity

In our first interview, Patrick told me, “It’s almost like here’s where we’re going today . . . The kids walk in and they already know, okay, here’s what I’m doing today . . . There’s something to look ahead to and there’s also something to show them where we’re going” (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 237-241). Patrick clearly communicated learning goals and tasks for students so they knew what to expect from the day’s lesson.

In five of the eight observed lessons, Patrick, like Rachel, included a “Do Now” assignment for students to complete as they entered the room. To focus students on the subject matter, Patrick asked students to answer specific questions, read the guidelines for a particular activity, or complete a brief questionnaire or worksheet. He commented that he often uses a “Do Now” type of activity to get students immediately engaged in the lesson and to maximize instructional time (Patrick, Interview 1). Each day, the majority of students, including those classified as SLD, were observed sitting at their desks seemingly on-task; thus, this practice appeared to accomplish Patrick’s desired intent. This “Do Now” structure was similar to Rachel’s “Tweet Me” activity in that both tasks immediately engaged students in Social Studies content.
With regard to the use of guided and independent practice, Patrick incorporated a greater number of opportunities for students to engage in guided practice than Rachel but fewer chances to participate in independent practice. In Lesson 2, for example, students were instructed to create a picture or image of each Enlightenment thinker’s concept of government. Patrick guided students through an example by drawing a tree with three large branches to represent Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of power—or the three “branches” of government (Patrick, Observation 2). Students were then required to independently complete this same task for the remaining individuals being studied while the teacher walked around the room and observed their work. When students appeared to struggle with the assignment, Patrick prompted their thinking by asking various questions: “How do you draw a picture of a blank slate? What does he say happens as you grow up? Maybe you can use the drawing of the baby and the blank slate and somehow show how it fills up” (Patrick, Observation 2). Patrick implemented similar actions in Observations 1, 2a, 3, and 3a as he walked around the room and monitored student progress. As students worked in groups, Patrick listened to their conversation, reflected their words back to them, and asked probing questions designed to support and extend their thinking. Thus, guided practice, an effective instructional strategy for use with students classified as SLD (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011), was a consistent feature employed in five of Patrick’s eight observed lessons. This was in stark contrast to Patrick’s extremely limited use of another effective instructional strategy—independent practice. I did not observe any examples of students actively engaged in independent
practice during Patrick’s lessons, and he only made one vague reference to a homework assignment in Observation 1b.

Like Rachel, Patrick implemented assessments in his classroom and it was unclear whether these assessments were formative in nature. For example, Patrick used an exit slip in Observation 1 to determine what students learned in class. The exit slip contained four questions—three of these required students to recall information provided during the lesson while the fourth question asked students to give their opinion about the importance of studying slavery. In a subsequent lesson, Patrick assessed students’ knowledge of slavery through a myth or fact activity. He told students, “I am going to read a statement, and you will move to where you believe it goes—is it a myth or a fact? If you believe it is a statement, go over here. If not, go over there” (Patrick, Observation 1a). Finally, in Observation 2a, students viewed a Zaption video online and answered questions about what they had been learning. It was not possible to determine, in any of these examples, whether or how Patrick used the assessment results to drive his instruction. He did tell students to “make sure you use your real name so I can track the responses” for the Zaption video, but he did not clarify his purpose for monitoring the students’ answers (Patrick, Observation 2a). Therefore, while assessments were obviously included in Patrick’s lessons, as they were in Rachel’s lessons, the purpose of these assessments could not be determined.

Both Rachel and Patrick presented lessons that included daily review of content, lesson objectives, and opportunities for both guided and independent practice. It remains uncertain, however, whether the assessments employed in their lessons were indeed
formative in nature and were used to adjust their future instruction, or whether they only used the assessment results to measure current student progress without any intention to modify their instruction. Regardless, the analysis of the lessons’ components revealed that the teachers’ instruction was primarily focused on student acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge rather than development of global strategies and rules for learning.

Rachel and Patrick routinely delivered explicit Social Studies content related to topics such as slavery and the Enlightenment Era, using a direct instruction, bottom-up processing approach to teaching.

Patrick’s comments during two separate interviews, however, seemed to indicate his desire to use a more strategic approach to teaching. During Interview 1, I asked Patrick what he hoped to accomplish in the classroom with his students classified as SLD. He responded:

It’s not to learn my content. I think anyone can learn content. I think I can Google it. I can ask Siri. What explorer came across the ocean in what year? Big deal. If that’s all they get out of my class, then I think I’m a failure. I think I’m not doing . . . I want to teach them. I know this is going to sound like pie in the sky, but they need to learn traits to be successful. They need to learn how to find information. They need to learn how to research. They need to know how to stand in from of a room and speak. They need to know how to work in a peer group (Patrick, Interview One, lines 627-634).

Patrick also told me in another interview, “Yeah, content’s important. I always say the skills . . . they have to learn the skill. How are they gonna learn the skill? They learn it
with the content if that makes sense. I need to drive it with something” (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 319-321). These comments reflect Patrick’s desire to shift his instructional focus from the explicit delivery of basic content and facts to a greater emphasis on students’ acquisition of global skills. Thus, these remarks appeared to be in direct contrast to Patrick’s overwhelming use of direct instruction in the observed lessons.

As the above discussion has shown, each of the participants implemented at least one of the shared components of direct instruction and strategic instruction. Rachel primarily employed a daily review of material and independent practice for students while Patrick provided students with daily statements of objectives and opportunities for guided practice. Although both participants assessed their students’ progress and understanding of newly presented material, neither made obvious use of formative assessment procedures. Finally, while the use of these components can certainly enrich the learning of students classified as SLD, Rachel and Patrick primarily used these practices to impart specific knowledge and skills to their students. While the most effective instruction for students classified as SLD is actually a combination of direct and strategic instruction (Swanson, 2001; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998), this was not evident in Rachel’s or Patrick’s lessons.

**Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiation has the potential to improve the academic achievement of all students, including those with identified needs (King-Sears, 2008). Differentiation occurs when a teacher modifies instruction to address the variance among learners and to
meet students’ individual needs. Teachers can differentiate the content of their lessons, the instructional process itself, or the end product of their teaching (Anderson, 2007). In this section, I discuss the numerous ways that Rachel and Patrick incorporate differentiation into their instructional practice.

Rachel often spoke about differentiation in her interviews, explaining why she made specific modifications to her instructional process. She repeatedly stated that she took additional time to teach specific content. In our first interview, Rachel commented, “Their project was supposed to be due Wednesday. They’re working amazing on it. I don’t want them to rush and give me garbage just because I need it on a date. So, I’m like, you have an extra day” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 421-424). Rachel expressed similar sentiments in Interview 2 when she said, “I want quality, not a rush for a date. I’m flexible. That’s why I don’t mind stopping class if it takes me all period to explain one sentence even if the kid who gets it is sitting there going, oh, my god. I’m bored,” (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 757-760). These comments reflected Rachel’s emphasis on the quality of the students’ work over the need to meet a pre-determined deadline as well as her commitment to ensuring that all students could access the curriculum. She explained that the way a student’s “brain works” could cause the student to work slowly (Rachel, Interview 1, line 376), thus requiring additional time for assignment completion.

When asked about the role that modifications and accommodations play in her classroom, Rachel told me about some additional ways she differentiated instruction for students classified as SLD. She mentioned chunking larger tasks into smaller segments in order to keep students engaged (Rachel, Interview 1); using computers for students
who had difficulty writing (Rachel, Interview 3); and using additional directions and clarifying documents to support struggling learners (Rachel, Interview 2). She incorporated differentiation strategies into her classroom because she wanted “to make sure the kids get it” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 771). She recognized that some students, especially students classified as SLD, often needed the teacher to present Social Studies content in a less traditional manner, and observation data confirmed that Rachel was willing to do so.

Rachel differentiated the presentation of information for her students in six of the observed lessons. She reduced the reading struggles of students classified as SLD by presenting information in videos rather than reading passages, and she also provided students with less complex texts (Rachel, Observation 3). Specifically, in Observation 3, students viewed a dramatization of a reading of the Declaration of Independence, and they received a copy of this document using simplified language. Rachel also modified the note taking process for her students by “doodling” class notes—drawing pictures rather than writing sentences to illustrate the main ideas of the lesson (Rachel, Observations 2 and 2b). The incorporation of such visual and auditory techniques remove possible barriers to learning—in these instances, reading and spelling—and can help students better retain classroom material (Tardi, Catarina & Goldstein, 2005/2006). Rachel took the needs of her students into account when she initially developed her lessons rather than making these adjustments later. In fact, she knew how to help her students because she learned about their individual learning needs. In Interview 3, Rachel told me that she conducted an activity early in the school year that gave her an
opportunity to observe how her students work together. Rachel identified students’ strengths and weaknesses, and she determined who emerged as the leaders and who tended to be shyer. She then used this information to structure her future lessons and determine how to best group students to maximize their learning.

The observations further revealed Rachel’s implementation of differentiated assessment strategies. In different lessons, she provided students with a word bank (Rachel, Observation 1a), a how-to sheet (Rachel, Observation 1b), and a template for organizing their notes (Rachel, Observation 2). These accommodations offered alternate ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of Social Studies content. When assessing student knowledge, the teacher also read questions and answer choices aloud to students (Rachel, Observation 2) and at times, she allowed them to draw, not write, their answers (Rachel, Observation 2b). These modifications were made for all students in Rachel’s class while others were made specifically for students with identified needs. In Interview 1, Rachel indicated that she typically develops two or three different modified versions of each formal assessment depending upon the needs of the students. She explained:

The wording might be exactly the same, but in parentheses, it’s like what that word might mean . . . Or it’s broken apart so, like instead of ten matching, as an example, I would break it five and five, so a kid could go like this and cover up half of it with his arms so they only focus on part of it. The font might be bigger . . . Instead of writing a paragraph, just list things (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 979-985).
Patrick also used differentiated instruction strategies in his lessons, and he offered his reasons for doing this. In Interview 2, he offered examples such as preferential seating, graphic organizers, and oral answers—modifications often recommended in students’ IEPs. Patrick further indicated that he provided students with scoring rubrics at the beginning of an assignment, so students had the information before doing the assignment.

So, all those things go into the way I build the lesson anyway. . . I always have to think how is that kid with a disability going to receive this lesson and what do I do better to get them—not so much master it, but level the playing field for that kid (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 183-188).

While Patrick stated that he purposefully planned his lessons to include modifications, he also explained that this practice is second nature to him since he has been doing it for so many years. He further demonstrated an understanding of his students’ needs when he explained why he used Gallery Walks in his classroom. He recognized that some students were afraid to stand up in front of the room and present to the larger class, leading him to conduct Gallery Walks so students could present in a more intimate, supportive setting. Finally, Patrick referenced his use of modified tests for students classified as SLD, indicating that he sometimes developed two or three different versions. He did not, however, provide any examples of specific modifications included in these assessments (Patrick, Interview 1).

Observations subsequently confirmed Patrick’s implementation of some of these differentiation strategies. He provided differentiated support for students in seven of the
eight observed lessons. He acknowledged that some students are visual learners while others are more adept at writing. Thus, he gave students the option to either draw or write about learned content (Patrick, Observation 2). In another lesson, he allowed students to respond to a given task via paper or on the computer, allowing them to choose the production method with which they felt most comfortable (Patrick, Observation 1b). Patrick further helped students complete required tasks by providing sample questions to ask the participants during a fishbowl activity (Patrick, Observation 2b); giving students a step-by-step “how to” sheet when completing an assignment (Patrick, Observation 3); and printing hard copies of assignments for students who preferred this mode over working on a computer (Patrick, Observation 1b). Similar to Rachel, Patrick provided these modifications to all of his students, explaining, “I'll tailor my lessons that way on purpose because I know everyone can benefit from it—not just that SLD kid,” (Patrick, Observation 2, lines 178-179).

Like Rachel, Patrick also reduced the reading struggles of students classified as SLD by differentiating the presentation of the lessons’ content. Specifically, he often used videos and pictures in addition to his presentation of critical information to students (Patrick, Observations 1, 1a, 2a, 2b, 3). In Observation 1, he employed video clips to depict modern day slavery while the next day he used a video excerpt from Amistad to illustrate slavery in the 1800s (Patrick, Observation 1a). He also presented lesson content via a picture slideshow to tell a story about protest and revolution in various countries (Patrick, Observation 3). In conjunction with these visual modalities, Patrick also frequently read questions and other narratives aloud in order to ease the students’
struggles with reading (Observation 1a, 3, 3a). As indicated above, he understood that these differentiation practices were beneficial not only for students classified as SLD, but for every student in the class, as well.

In sum, Rachel and Patrick both differentiated their classroom instruction for students, and they used similar practices to address the individual needs of their students. Both participants read aloud and used videos to differentiate their presentation of Social Studies content. They provided students with additional guidance and support to complete tasks, and they differentiated the format of class assessments. They also allowed students to respond via a computer or through drawings rather than writing their answers in a traditional manner. In fact, Rachel and Patrick demonstrated the same differentiation techniques except that Rachel also used extended timelines and the chunking of academic content, which Patrick did not. In almost all instances, these differentiation techniques were made available to all students—not just those classified as SLD—because the teachers believed all students could and should benefit from these practices.

**Multisensory Instruction**

As the term implies, multisensory instruction refers to presenting information through multiple senses. When several of the senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell are simultaneously engaged, students are more apt to remember newly presented information. Students classified as SLD typically experience challenges with particular instructional modalities (visual and/or auditory processing), so the use of multisensory instruction enables these students to use their strengths to help them learn. This section
presents data regarding Rachel’s and Patrick’s use of multisensory techniques in their instruction.

Rachel frequently incorporated multisensory techniques in her lessons. In Interview 1, I asked her to give me some examples of specific practices she used in her classroom to help her students with identified needs. She explained that Social Studies is like real life storytelling, so she uses stories to teach her students specific content. She explained:

A story. Just like you hear a song on the radio. You hear it once, you get it stuck in your head. So, you know, especially at this age, that’s what they want—they want to hear the fun—they want to be entertained every day. So, if I can entertain them—quote, unquote—a little bit, but it has facts hidden, and they don’t realize it . . . so, definitely storytelling—that’s my thing (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 124-131).

Specifically, Rachel used dramatic storytelling strategies to teach about the exploration of the New World (Rachel, Interview 1). She modified the content of well-known stories such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* or *The Wizard of Oz*, and she wrote an outline of a script. The script included references to explorers, the items they were hoping to find in the New World, and the challenges they faced. Students were then assigned roles and acted out the story in class in an overly dramatic style (Rachel, Observations 1 and 2). Rachel used a similar kinesthetic technique when teaching students about Research Simulation Tasks—a written analytic essay of an informational topic using several articles or multimedia resources. In this instance, Rachel read one of the articles aloud
while students acted it out (Rachel, Interview 2). She commented that “acting out things will cause it to stick in your head. You may understand it. It’s a strategy to try and pull information for understanding.” (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 343-345). Rachel used such an approach so students could see and feel what they were learning and so the content would be more comprehensible (Rachel, Interview 2). Rachel’s interview responses were later supported by an actual performance of *The Wizard of Oz* in Observations 1 and 1a.

Rachel also made frequent references to the use of videos to present and reinforce Social Studies content. She stated that videos must be age-appropriate, and they should have something “catchy” to interest the students (Rachel, Interview 1, line 513). Thus, Rachel chose videos with interesting characters, a good theme song, or “something silly to get stuck in their head” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 476). For example, in Observation 3, Rachel played a video that was narrated by Morgan Freeman. This well-known actor provided background about the people, landmarks, and events surrounding the writing of the Declaration of Independence. The next day, Rachel showed the students another video of famous actors and actresses reciting the Declaration of Independence (Rachel, Observation 3a). She provided students with the actual words as well as a translation of the document. This practice addressed the auditory and visual learning needs of the students.

Rachel also incorporated computer technology into her instruction. By their nature, computers help students learn through seeing, hearing, and reading simultaneously—thus, addressing multiple learning modalities. In Observation 2, Rachel used a Zaption video to review the Slave Trade with her students. Students observed a
video about this topic, and Rachel embedded comprehension questions within it. She read the questions and answer choices aloud for the students, and the students answered the questions on their own computers. On that same day, Rachel also assigned students a homework activity that needed to be completed through G Suite for Education (formerly Google Apps for Education). She commented that students had previously completed a similar assignment on G Suite regarding the Slave Trade (Rachel, Observation 2b). These assignments were yet another example of multisensory tasks that allowed students to learn through more than one sense at a time.

Patrick frequently incorporated videos and technology into his daily instruction as well, using these practices in four of the observed lessons. He used this multisensory practice in a slightly different manner in each of his lessons beginning with the use of video clips in Observation 1 to depict modern day slavery in countries such as Ghana, Nepal, India, and Haiti. He provided narration for the students as the video was playing, presenting numerous facts about modern slavery. Similarly, in Observation 3, Patrick used slideshow pictures to tell a story about current day protests throughout the world. Again, he read notes from the slideshow and briefly commented on each picture. He also used videos to assess student learning. Similar to Rachel’s practice, Patrick used a Zaption video to present information and assess students’ immediate understanding (Patrick, Observation 2a). Finally, Patrick employed a WebQuest in Observation 1b. In this inquiry-oriented lesson, students used computers to access a Google document that contained links to various websites. Students then used the information from these websites to complete the assigned task. The visual, auditory, and kinesthetic nature of
these techniques addressed the various learning needs of all the students, including students classified as SLD, in Patrick’s class.

Patrick was also a strong supporter of the use of G Suite and Google Classroom. When asked how these applications are particularly beneficial to students classified as SLD, Patrick replied, “For a kid with SLD, it’s structure . . . There’s clear outlines . . . Here’s what’s expected of you. You post online rubrics . . . You can edit it. The teacher can have feedback . . . I can talk to him while he’s on it.” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 76-84). Patrick appreciated how Google is used to structure assignments and interact with students in real time as they work on assignments. He also recognized and praised the multisensory aspect of Google applications:

So, that SLD kid is that quiet kid by nature. Google drive or technology allows that kid to participate as much as everyone else. So, now he’s typing, and he’s part of the conversation or he’s part of the assignment. They have to share it with one other person, and they’re clicking on links. And they’re doing everything else up to par as much as any other student. Whereas in a real class situation, that kid might kinda shrink to the back of the room, and you don’t hear from him as much (Patrick, Interview 2, line 96-102).

Patrick acknowledged that technology enables students to be active participants in class discussions in a way that is more comfortable for them and is better suited to their unique learning modalities.

Rachel and Patrick expressed value for delivering Social Studies content through a multisensory approach because it engages students and fosters the retention of
information. They both frequently used computer-based modalities such as videos and G Suite to present academic material to students. They also used Zaption to assess their students’ understanding of newly presented content. Rachel also used the multisensory technique of dramatic storytelling to engage and motivate her students. Through this technique, students assumed various roles and acted out a story loosely based on the current content being taught in class. Students recited lines, sang songs, danced, chanted, and acted out a storyline in order to reinforce Social Studies concepts. Such techniques enable students to engage multiple senses at once so they can better learn specific content.

**Making Instruction Relevant**

Students maintain interest and motivation when the content being studied is personally relevant (Marks, 2000; Wang & Eccles, 2013). When students are engaged with content being taught and are able to connect it to their own lives, they tend to remember it more readily. In this study, both Rachel and Patrick expressed a desire to make their instruction relevant and meaningful for their students. I discuss these practices in this section.

Rachel expressed the belief that Social Studies content easily lends itself to making connections between subject matter and the students’ own lives (Rachel, Interview 2). She told me, “I mean, current events, you can find something easily. Anyone watch the news? Ever hear about this or get an alert on the phone?” (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 839-841). She also used You Tube videos and subjects trending on social media to help students establish personal connections to lesson content. She also
related material to students’ everyday experiences. In Observation 2a, she connected Enlightenment ideals of questioning and rebellion to students’ own complaints against the school’s food service company. This comparison created a link between students’ lived experiences and a less familiar topic. Additionally, when her own examples were ineffective in establishing the desired relevancy, Rachel told me she then used other examples suggested by her students. She told me, “it makes my day” when she is able to connect her lesson’s content to the students’ real lives (Rachel, Interview 1, line 85).

Rachel affirmed that instructional relevance is important because it helps students realize that she understands their world (Rachel, Interview 2).

Patrick expressed similar sentiments about the importance of connecting instructional topics to students’ lives. He explained to me:

I was told years ago, the what factor or the why factor. You don’t teach it because the curriculum says it. You teach it because there’s gotta be something. The reason we’re learning about explorers from 500 years ago is . . . and then I usually start with the end in the beginning (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 277-280).

Patrick explained that students are not often interested in events that occurred long ago, so he needs to make these past events “match their interests” (Patrick, Interview 1, line 290). During the unit on explorers, Patrick showed students examples of individuals participating in extreme sports such as BASE jumping. He suggested the possibility that such extreme sportsmen could be called explorers, and he asked students to consider the difference between an explorer and an adventurer. Patrick stated that this connection
“hooked” students into the lesson on New World explorers (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 285).

Patrick also used other techniques to foster students’ personal connection to Social Studies content and engage them in their learning. In Interview 2, he told me that he employed modern news footage to make his instruction relevant and depict parallels between past and current events. When teaching about the American Revolution and the role of government, Patrick showed footage of race riots, unrest in North Korea, and rioting during Hurricane Katrina to illustrate possible results of the absence of government or the presence of a repressive government (Patrick, Interview 2). He also used modern day events to make the study of the Enlightenment more relevant to students. In Observation 2b, students participated in a Fishbowl activity designed to help them understand how the Age of Enlightenment affected the world today. Patrick asked students to debate topics such as individual rights, freedom of speech, racism, women’s rights, balance of power, and immigration. He told the students, “John Locke believed that all men are created free and equal. He was the rock star of the Enlightenment Era. Fast forward to modern day U.S.A. Is there still racism in the U.S. today?” (Patrick, Observation 2b). He further asked the students to consider whether individuals, in an age of terrorism, should give up their right to privacy in order to keep the public safe. The themes that students discussed were rooted in Enlightenment thinking, and Patrick engaged them in an activity that connected these historical ideas to the students’ current lived experiences.
In summary, both Rachel and Patrick valued and used current events known to the students to connect past events to the students’ own lives. Rachel used events from YouTube and social media to make these connections while Patrick referred to current news footage to make history relevant to his students. They both expressed the belief that relevancy helps students better comprehend concepts that may be unfamiliar to them, and it also aides in their understanding of the connection between past events and their own lives.

**Analogies**

The interview and observation data indicated that Rachel and Patrick also used analogies to improve the understanding of their included students with identified needs. An analogy is a similarity between concepts and is used to help students make connections between familiar concepts and newly presented material (Glynn, 2007). The use of analogies is especially helpful for teaching complex and abstract concepts (Dilber & Duzgun, 2008; Glynn, 2004). While this strategy was not observed as frequently as those previously discussed, I observed each participant use analogies in five separate lessons (Rachel, Observations 2, 2a and 3; Patrick, Observations 3 and 3a).

In Observations 2 and 2a, Rachel used an analogy to introduce the Enlightenment Era. She explained that during this era, people questioned science and the government. She stated, “This is like a child growing up. The same is true of middle school. You often ask your parents why? . . . Why do I have to go to bed so early? Why do I have to eat this? Back then, people were asking why is the church in charge? Why do we have to listen to the king?” (Rachel, Observation 2a). In Observation 2a, Rachel used another
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analogy to further students’ understanding about people’s unhappiness during the Enlightenment Era. She reminded students about the time they complained about the food in the school’s cafeteria. Rather than merely complaining, she encouraged them to speak to the school’s food vendor and together, they brainstormed new food choices. Rachel’s use of analogies made these historical events more meaningful and understandable to the students in her class.

Rachel employed yet another example of an analogy in Observation 3 when she presented a “break-up note” to the class. She told the students that she found an unsigned note on the floor in the back of the room and was concerned about the person who wrote it—it seemed like the student was going through a difficult time. She was hoping to identify the note’s author and thought the students might recognize the content, so she began to read the note aloud. The author of the note expressed her anger and disappointment in her boyfriend and described the many issues that bothered her about their relationship. In the note, the author essentially broke up with her boyfriend. The students were riveted by the note, periodically making remarks and comments about its contents. Eventually, Rachel told them it was signed A.C.—American Colonist. She explained that the American Colonists’ desire to start their own country and gain independence from England was similar to a break-up between a boyfriend and girlfriend.

Patrick made similar use of analogies during his unit on the American Revolution. Like Rachel, he also used examples of students complaining and objecting to their parents’ rules to make connections to the feelings of the American colonists (Patrick,
Observation 3). During the discussion, students offered examples such as curfews and household chores that could be analogous to the complaints of the colonists. In his next lesson (Patrick, Observation 3a), he expanded on his discussion of revolution and protests. Once again, similar to Rachel’s example, he used an analogy to compare the protests of American colonists with students’ complaints in the school—something to which students could relate. He described the process that the students might use if they are unhappy with a specific school policy. Students might speak with the Vice-Principal and Principal, start a petition, and appear before the Board of Education to express their displeasure.

Analogies provide a conceptual bridge for students to make connections between familiar and unfamiliar concepts, and they are effective at helping students learn new course material. Rachel and Patrick employed this strategy in their classrooms when they made connections between the Enlightenment Era, the American Revolution, and events in the students’ own lives. Using this instructional technique, the teachers enhanced students’ understanding of Social Studies concepts.

**Discussion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the participants’ use of instructional strategies in their Social Studies inclusion classrooms. When working with students classified as SLD, Rachel and Patrick employed strategies of direct instruction, differentiation, multisensory instruction, relevant instruction, and analogies. Their approach to teaching was best characterized as direct instruction because they tended to impart specific knowledge and skills to their students rather than conveying general rules for learning.
While many components of direct instruction were evident in the participants’ lessons, they used and emphasized different strategies. Specifically, Rachel incorporated a daily review of material into her lessons by starting each lesson with a “Tweet Me” activity. Patrick did not employ this practice, but instead started his lessons with a statement of the day’s objective. Rachel provided opportunities for students to engage in independent practice while Patrick typically gave students opportunities for guided practice. Although both participants used the direct instruction component of assessing student progress, they conducted their assessments using different methods.

Aside from the examples related to direct instruction, Rachel’s and Patrick’s instructional practices differed in only two other notable ways. Rachel differentiated her instruction by chunking newly presented content for students—that is, breaking larger amounts of content into smaller segments. The use of dramatic storytelling was another technique unique to Rachel. She used storylines familiar to her students to develop parallel stories about the content she was currently teaching. Students then acted out the new story in class, reinforcing Social Studies content.

While differences in their instructional approaches were evident, the similarities were more salient. Both employed analogies in their classrooms to help students assimilate new content with students’ prior knowledge. They also used similar differentiation strategies (e.g., modified assessments, video clips, how-to sheets, alternative response methods) and multisensory instruction techniques (e.g., G Suite, Zaption) in their classrooms. They commented not only on the value of both differentiation and multisensory practices, but also on the necessity of making their
content relevant to students’ lives. They often used current events to connect historical events with present day happenings. Finally, both Rachel and Patrick expressed their beliefs that the instructional practices described in this chapter are not only beneficial for students classified as SLD, but they are advantageous for all students in the classroom.
Chapter Six

Teacher-Student Relationships Findings

Middle school students have unique needs, and thus, it is necessary to examine the social and emotional aspects of their classrooms as well as their academic features. Affective characteristics of the classroom are related to student learning (Juvonen, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004; Shann, 1999), and a positive classroom climate can lead to increased student achievement (Pianta, LaParo, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Numerous studies also indicate a strong correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and academic achievement (Fan, 2012; O’Connor & McCartney, 2007; Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012). In addition, the quality of the classroom climate is especially important during students’ middle school years (Matsumura et al., 2008). In this chapter, I examine the climate of each participant’s classroom relative to the nature of teacher-student relationships and peer relationships. I also make connections to the RCT concepts of mutuality and authenticity. Mutuality is a relational process that involves reciprocal engagement and empathy in relationships, and authenticity is the ability to represent one’s self honestly in a relationship while remaining ever mindful of this openness on the other person.

Mutual and Authentic Teacher-Student Relationships

A positive classroom climate fosters respectful and caring relationships between teachers and students, cooperation and respect among students, and an environment in which students are safe to express themselves (Matsumura et al., 2008). Positive relationships in middle school classrooms also cultivate a sense of belonging and promote
student success (Kronenberg & Strahan, 2010). In their classrooms, Rachel and Patrick both demonstrated actions and articulated sentiments about the importance of strong teacher-student relationships. In Interview 2, Patrick stated, “If I don’t have a rapport with my kids, I’m never gonna get them to do anything. I don’t care if it’s SLD, general ed, enriched. I have to have that rapport with them” (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 38-45). Similarly, Rachel told me that her students “know I care about them . . . they know” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 953-962). Both expressed the importance of quality teacher-student relationships, and they were deeply committed to nurturing positive connections within their classrooms.

Rachel engaged with her students in a way that engendered mutuality and respect. She empathized with her students’ experiences and reacted in a caring and supportive manner. For example, during one observation, a student returned from her music lesson after missing most of her Social Studies class. When the student told the teacher that she could not come to the classroom after school to get her missed work, the teacher understood the student’s dilemma and offered to help her at lunch time instead (Rachel, Observation 2b). Similarly, in Observation 3b, Rachel called upon students to come to the front of the room and read a translated version of the Declaration of Independence. Recognizing the hesitancy of some students, she said, “If you are uncomfortable, just say so, and we’ll pass you up. If you change your mind, let me know” (Rachel, Observation 3b). While the teacher genuinely wanted all students to participate, she respected their feelings of reluctance and allowed them to make the decision themselves. The
development of mutual respect between teachers and students is critical to the creation of mutuality, and Rachel expressed these sentiments often.

In Interview 2, I asked Rachel if she believed that modeling positive behaviors for her students contributed to the climate of the classroom. She answered in the affirmative and also explained that she candidly told her students, “You’re going to get respect from me, as you deserve, as long as you give it to me. This is our classroom” (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 209-211). This statement emphasized the importance for both the teacher and the students to actively participate in the construction of the relationship, and it highlighted the mutual nature of their connection. She stressed that it is “our” classroom and not hers alone. This focus on mutuality was also evident in her views about honesty in relationships. She explained:

I would like you (students) to learn something. However, if you’ve learned how to respect others and listen—not just hear—you gotta do both. I go, “Then my job is successful.” So, it’s a whole respect thing. It’s a huge thing on me. If you’re rude, and you give someone a dirty look, that’s it. You’re done. You lie. That’s the worst thing for me. They know that. Don’t lie to me. Own it up. So, respect is a big thing (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 236-241).

Consistent with RCT views, Rachel recognized that she and her students needed to be open and responsive to each other’s feelings and intentions in order to form a positive relationship (Spencer, Jordan, & Sazama, 2004). Rachel was genuine in her interactions with her students, and she expected the same in return. What’s more, she told me that it would be difficult for a student to be successful in her classroom if he lied to her (Rachel,
Interview 2). Rachel explicitly stated her views regarding the significance of mutual respect in her classroom, and she also exhibited respectful interactions with her students, especially those classified as SLD.

Rachel used a great deal of respect—in the form of discretion—in her interactions with students classified as SLD. She explained that some students had learning and social difficulties in the classroom, and she took it upon herself to discretely conceal these challenges. For example, Rachel did not ask students to put their names on their daily tweets “so they don’t get embarrassed” if they presented poor handwriting or misspelled words (Rachel, Interview 2). During this same interview, she told me:

I know that kid didn’t do his homework. I don’t want it to stand out ‘cause he never does his homework. He doesn’t understand his homework. His home life—he can’t do homework. But, his job now is to collect everyone else’s homework where no one’s gonna know he didn’t do his homework. Because if like, say, you were collecting my homework, you’re gonna know I didn’t do it, but if he’s the one collecting, no one’s gonna know. So, that’s kinda like the cover up . . . I assign them little tasks that make them blend in, in a way, and that they can still feel successful and like they have a job (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 61-70).

Rachel did not want the students to face feelings of shame and humiliation so she made great efforts to protect their privacy. She further explained that there were times when she needed to address a particular matter with a student classified as SLD, but she was concerned about making the student stand out in front of his peers. Thus, she invited a
small group of students into the hallway to “touch base” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 943) with each of them individually. One by one, she spoke to and then sent each back into the classroom, leaving the intended target of her discussion as the last student in the hallway. In this way, she was able to speak respectfully and privately to the student classified as SLD without bringing undue attention to him. Because students classified as SLD tend to experience lower academic and social self-efficacy than their general education peers (Lackaye & Margalit, 2008; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006), Rachel’s demonstrated respect for the students’ privacy can help to preserve their self-esteem. Students learn that they matter to the teacher, and this type of interaction supports the growth-fostering relationships that Relational-Cultural theorists believe are especially beneficial to adolescents (Jordan, 2008b).

Rachel’s genuine care and respect for students classified as SLD is further evident in her execution of Student Theater. As mentioned in a previous chapter, she often implemented Student Theater in her classroom as a way to reinforce important Social Studies concepts. She developed the basic outline of a script with storylines that were analogous to the current content being taught. In a unit on explorers, she used characters and events from the *Wizard of Oz* to represent content from the current unit. The Land of Oz was equated to the New World; the horse of many colors represented the horses that the Europeans brought to the New World; and the main characters assumed the characteristics of the explorers being studied. For instance, the Wicked Witch was compared to Pizarro because both behaved in despicable ways. Students volunteered for specific parts, and together, the teacher and the students performed the rudimentary script
using a great deal of improvisation. Rachel’s respect for the students’ differences became especially apparent during these performances.

Rachel showed empathy for the students in her class, and she made efforts to include all students—especially those with identified needs—in every classroom activity. When she had students in her class who were especially shy and hesitant to speak in front of others, she created roles for them like rocks and trees. “It has nothing to do with the story, but they are part of the story. You know, they feel included then. So, if someone maybe has a speech issue, but they are extremely smart, but they are afraid to talk—or a language barrier—they can still participate” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 240-243). She explained in a later interview that she wanted “the little parts to feel as equally important” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 46), and she wanted “them to still have the ability to participate comfortably for themselves” (Rachel, Interview 1, line 51). For example, when a student classified as SLD was shy and read his part in a quiet voice, Rachel empathized with him and encouraged him by saying, “Give me a roar. I know you’re waking up” (Rachel, Observation 1). She responded to a similar situation with the statement, “Our guest star is really quiet now, so we’re going to whisper this part” (Rachel, Observation 1). Rather than marginalize the students who were hesitant to participate in Student Theater, she devised ways to include them and make them feel successful.

Rachel articulated her desire to make students feel included and valued on other occasions, as well. In Interview 2, I asked her to tell me about her decision-making process for grouping students for assignments. She explained that the groupings change depending upon the nature of the activity and the make-up of the students. In one
particular instance, she had two students who were extremely reserved and shy, and they had requested to work together. She commented, “Why am I gonna torture one kid with a very sociable popular kid, and they’re gonna feel, you know, less capable” (Rachel Interview 2, lines 388-390). In Interview 3, I inquired about her strong focus on respect, and I asked if she believed this approach had an impact on her students with identified needs. She responded:

I think so because then they don’t feel like they’re isolated—that they’re equally supposed to be respected, and they’re supposed to be respectable . . . the respect comes into that where you have to respect everyone being an individual (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 296-297).

Rachel went on to further elucidate:

. . . respect across the board. That’s my biggest thing. I would hope the kids don’t feel isolated then because if I see someone’s not being respected—especially kids that are not able. . .like they are getting low grades. They look around to see who gets what grade and everything, and they feel down on themselves. They’re trying really hard . . . So, I stand up for them (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 312-319).

Her repeated use of the word ‘isolated’ highlights her understanding of how easily students—especially those with identified needs—can be excluded from the classroom environment.

Authenticity, or the ability to represent one’s self honestly, in relationships is also fundamental for growth according to RCT (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Jordan, 2008b).
Rachel displayed authenticity in her relationships with students when she shared her own emotions and life experiences. Since empathy is relational and dynamic (Duffey, 2006), Rachel’s willingness to be vulnerable to her students opened the door for mutual empathy to occur. During one classroom observation, a student asked the teacher if she missed her during her absence, and she straightforwardly replied, “Of course, I did. I always miss you” (Rachel, Observation 2). At the beginning of almost every observed lesson, I witnessed similar exchanges between the teacher and her students as they engaged in casual conversation about a variety of educational as well as personal topics. For example, in one class, a student proclaimed, “You’re my favorite teacher” (Rachel, Observation 1b). This was stated in a very matter-of-fact manner, and Rachel readily accepted the compliment. She explained:

They can easily tell me things all the time I guess because they feel comfortable. They tell me everything . . . I think it’s important because then you seem human and that you don’t live within your room. They know that you know what goes on within the world, and that’s what goes around them. That you’re connecting with their real life (Rachel, Interview 2, lines 831-836).

Rachel reciprocated this type of interaction, and she displayed her vulnerability to the students in her class. In Interview 1, Rachel acknowledged that she told students she is a poor speller, and she often needs to check the accuracy of her spelling. She explained that it is difficult for students to admit that they need help with their work, so she deliberately shared her own challenges with the students. She wanted students to realize that she can relate to them through her own experiences. Additionally, when she did not
know the answer to a question posed by a student, she pointedly searched for the answer on the computer or on a smartphone (Rachel, Interview 1). These types of authentic interactions were especially evident when she re-counted her own struggles as a middle school and college student.

During Interview 2, I asked Rachel how she included students with identified needs in her classroom. She shared that when she was in middle school, she battled epilepsy and was often excluded from school activities. She was not allowed to participate in physical education, and instead, was forced to sit on the sidelines of the gymnasium. She felt isolated, alone, and uncomfortable, watching her classmates participate in various events. She believed her classmates regarded her as a “freak” (Rachel, Interview 2, line 108). She confided, that because of her past experience:

I always think of like how would that kid feel? What is the best way I can make him blend in? He knows he’s different or she knows she’s different. She knows she’s got issues. She knows, you know, she’s got a lot of acne or she can’t read out loud but how can I at least make her feel like she can or someone think that she can? So, I always have that way of thinking (Rachel, Interview 2, line 109-114).

She further demonstrated her authentic stance by telling the students she did not perform well in one of her college courses. She explained, “I think it’s important to show them that you’re a person, and everyone has their disabilities . . . I’m showing them everyone goes through this. But, I think verbalizing that kind of stuff helps kids with any type of needs” (Rachel, Interview 3, lines 669-678). Rachel was genuinely present in her
interactions with her students, and she made it known to them that she related to their experiences. By engaging with adolescents in an authentic manner, she was helping them feel more connected and better able to express themselves (Liang et al., 2004; Spencer et al., 2004).

Patrick also exhibited mutuality and authenticity in his interactions with students. In fact, he identified the importance of teacher-student rapport on six separate occasions throughout the three interviews. When I asked Patrick why he believed he was nominated as a successful inclusion teacher, he told me:

I always—since year one—try to pride myself in developing a huge rapport with the kids, and I think if you get them from day one, you can take them anywhere.

So, I think that regardless of the population that you’re given—special ed, general ed—the student and teacher rapport is critical. Being invested in their needs; having an interest in what they are interested in (Patrick, Interview 1, lines 9-14).

He expressed these same sentiments again in Interview 2 and Interview 3, emphasizing the necessity of knowing one’s students. He said:

You gotta reach the kids at their level. They always say at the middle school, you have to understand the kid you’re teaching . . . If you don’t understand that kid, I don’t care, you can be the best teacher in the world—and I use that loosely. They will not come along for the journey (Patrick, Interview 3 page 8 line 339-348).

He cared about the students’ individual interests and went out of his way to discover them (Patrick, Interviews 2 and 3). He recognized that students gravitate towards those who understand and value them, and thus, he worked hard to create a “welcoming,
nurturing environment” (Patrick, Interview 2, line 146). Patrick joked and laughed with his students, and he believed this empowered his students to feel comfortable raising their hands and taking risks in his class (Patrick, Interview 2). These relationships, characterized by increased mutuality, have the potential to increase the students’ sense of self-worth and connectedness (Comstock et al., 2008; Duffey & Somody, 2011). The mutual respect that he shared with students seemed especially evident in a story that he shared with me in Interview 2.

In that interview, I asked Patrick to tell me about a time when he felt particularly successful working with a student classified as SLD. He relayed a story about a student who faced a myriad of challenges in addition to those associated with his classification. At home, the student faced issues of abuse, drug use, and lack of support; in school, the student was typically disengaged from the lessons and behaved in a disruptive manner. Patrick displayed genuine concern for the student and worked tirelessly to build a sense of trust with him through constant conversation. Eventually, the student shared his own feelings and experiences with Patrick, allowing them to engage with one another in a mutually respectful and caring manner. Patrick told him, “I know what’s going on with you. You can overcome this. I want you to come with me. This is your way out . . . You can do something about it” (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 326-328, 332). The teacher collaborated with the student to determine his preferred learning style, and together, they developed a plan that eventually helped the student be academically successful. The teacher acknowledged that the mutual nature of their relationship enabled them to work closely together when he stated, “He let me help him—which is really cool” (Patrick,
Interview 2, line 356). When students believe that adults genuinely care for them, they are more likely to make honest connections with them (Spencer et al., 2004), and the narrative above is an excellent example of such a relationship built on mutuality and concern.

Patrick’s emphasis on positive teacher-student rapport was also evident in the work observed in his classroom. In all eight observations, he stood at the classroom doorway and greeted his students with a smile and “Good morning. How are you?”.

Students then typically engaged with the teacher in casual, personal conversation about weekend plans, the start of spring, and Groundhog Day (Patrick, Observation 1a). An environment of mutual respect was further supported by the way the teacher and students spoke and interacted with each other. For example, students demonstrated respect for the rules of the classroom (Patrick, Observation 2b), and they responded to teacher directions immediately (Patrick, Observations 1, 2a, and 3a). Throughout the eight observed lessons, I never observed any disciplinary concerns or disrespectful interactions between the teacher and students; rather, I observed an easy, comfortable rapport between them. As Patrick confirmed:

> There is that mutual respect—how you talk to a kid, how you approach students. It is . . . no one would ever say that I’m a strict teacher. Ever. And I don’t know if that’s good or bad. Honestly, I don’t yell at kids. I don’t scream at them. I don’t belittle them (Patrick, Interview 3, lines 355-358).

Patrick valued the students for who they were, and he treated them with tremendous respect.
In addition to his respectful demeanor toward students, Patrick also interacted with students in an authentic manner. He was genuinely interested in what students had to say, and he took the time to listen to them. After the fishbowl activity in Observation 2b, he instructed the students to “answer the reflection part and give honest feedback. Was the fishbowl activity effective? Not effective? What did you like? Not like?” He asked for the students’ honest reactions so he could modify and improve his lesson. He also told me that early in his career, a colleague stressed the importance of listening to his students (Patrick, Interview 2). Patrick took this advice to heart, and he stated, “That kinda set me on that path of, let me get to know my kids first before I teach them” (Patrick, Interview 2, lines 374-375). He also emphasized that it is critical to “show them your true human side” (Patrick, Observation 3, line 369) in order to develop strong relationships and genuine interactions. This notion of authenticity, allowing students to see his true feelings while also expressing his own interest in their feelings, leads to student empowerment and improved relational competence (Duffey & Somody, 2011).

Rachel’s and Patrick’s words and actions provided insight into their feelings of respect, mutuality, and authenticity for and with their students. Rather than creating barriers between themselves and their students, they allowed themselves to be genuine and reciprocal in their interactions with them. Both teachers expected and imparted a high level of respect in their classrooms, and they cared about helping students be successful, including those students classified as SLD. The teachers’ own experiences and beliefs further inspired them to affect and be affected by their students. This was evidenced by Rachel’s willingness to discuss her own childhood medical illness and
Patrick’s persistence in helping one student overcome his own academic and familial challenges. When less powerful individuals, such as the students, realize that more powerful people, like teachers, recognize and validate their feelings and experiences, they begin to feel less isolated and begin to build a sense of empowerment (Jordan, 2000; Jordan, 2008a). Thus, as in the case of Rachel and Patrick, it is critical that teachers engage with students in ways that engender mutuality and authenticity.

**Positive Peer Relationships**

Numerous studies have shown that adolescents who have learned from and with each other, and have also encountered positive peer relations, are more engaged in classroom instruction and experience greater academic success (Bushweller, 1995; Ruzek et al., 2016; Santrock, 1989; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Moreover, Matsumura and colleagues (2008) found that the degree of respect that teachers showed students significantly predicted students’ behavior toward one another. This research highlights the importance of creating a positive classroom climate of caring and respect in which students work collaboratively with one another. Indeed, Rachel and Patrick talked about and demonstrated such a climate in their own classrooms, as I show in this section of the paper.

Rachel valued classroom projects and activities that required students to work together collaboratively. She described a Westward Expansion project in which students built wagons and re-created a community of the 1800’s. She explained that students “had a good time, and they realized the importance of working together . . . they ran the show. They had ownership of it” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 715-716, 724). She especially
treasured the way this project enabled students, especially those classified as SLD, to excel in a less traditional academic manner. Peers “saw them in a different light . . . Wow! Look at him build. He’s awesome!” (Rachel, Interview 1, lines 728-730).

Rachel’s assertions are consistent with research indicating that cooperative learning activities foster positive interdependence, improved self-esteem, and greater acceptance of students with identified needs by their non-disabled peers (Slavin, 1991). Rachel strove for these outcomes in her classroom, and this was evident in her classroom assignments. During Observation 1a, she explained the guidelines for the upcoming Art Gallery. She told the students that they would each receive a post-it note, and she further explained:

> You need to write a positive comment and put it on the poster. It is not only for the artist—it is also for others to see later in the day. It is not a negative comment . . . You should write positive remarks. I like the way you . . . (Rachel, Observation 1a).

Rachel recognized that it was easy for students to get down on themselves even though they tried really hard, and she did not tolerate disrespect among the students in her class (Rachel, Interview 3). She did not want students to feel isolated; rather, she wanted them to feel like esteemed members of the class. She underscored this perspective: “The focus is just leave each other alone. Be nice to each other” (Rachel, Interview 3, line 320).

While the teacher was the primary source of information for these illustrations of peer to peer interactions, the students’ own actions presented the most powerful examples of the positive peer relations in Rachel’s classroom.
As described earlier, Rachel periodically implemented Student Theater into her Social Studies lessons. On several separate occasions during these performances, students demonstrated actions that reflected care, support, and concern for peers. During Observation 1, the script required the student playing the role of the Lion to recite a poem by Lady Gaga. The student, who was classified as SLD, looked uncomfortable and was hesitant to do so. Then, spontaneously, several students in the audience began to recite the poem with the Lion. This behavior, on the part of the students, encouraged the Lion to perform the poem, and he did so with a broad grin. This action was then replicated in Observation 1a when the Lion was once again embarrassed to perform a chant. One student jumped on stage with the Lion and stated, “I’ll be your back up” (Rachel, Observation 1a) as he put his arm around the Lion and began chanting. Within seconds, four additional students also joined the Lion on stage and began chanting and singing with him. As a result of his peers’ support, the Lion was able to be an active participant in both of these lessons. Instead of marginalizing the student with identified needs and mocking him for his insecurities, the other students supported and encouraged him by assisting him with his task. Their reactions were not only reflective of the respect that the teacher showed her students, but they were indicative of the level of respect that she expected them to show each other as well. Furthermore, these were exemplary illustrations of mutual empathy. The Lion volunteered for this part, and he put himself in a situation that exposed his vulnerability to the others in the class. In turn, his peers allowed themselves to be vulnerable as they joined him on the stage and began to sing and chant. In these moments, the students established a context of respect and trust,
knowing that their actions would impact the other person. Thus, a climate of mutuality emerged.

Similar to Rachel, Patrick also implemented collaborative activities in his lessons. For example, students worked in pairs during a ‘Think, Pair, Share’ activity during Observation 3a, and they worked in small groups during Observation 1 and Observation 3. Because he valued inclusion, he assigned each student a particular role within the group in order to encourage everyone’s participation. In one lesson, he reminded students to “let someone be the writer; someone be the speaker” (Patrick, Observation 1). A student classified as SLD volunteered to be the writer in Observation 1 while a different student classified as SLD ‘shared out’ the group’s answers in Observation 3. During these group activities, students with identified needs were consistently observed interacting with classmates and contributing to discussions. Students with identified needs and their general education peers conversed respectfully with one another, listening when others spoke and giving consideration to their answers. Patrick reminded the students about his beliefs regarding positive peer interactions in his statement, “We know how we work as a class. We work really well” (Patrick, Observation 1b). These respectful exchanges were especially evident during the Fishbowl activity in Observation 2b.

During the Fishbowl activity, students seated inside the “fishbowl” actively participated in a discussion by sharing their opinions, while students on the outside listened to the ideas presented. Students took turns in these roles, so that they practiced being both contributors and listeners in the group discussions. Students on the outside
received an observation sheet of questions, and they were instructed to make notations while they watched the contributors’ interactions. Patrick reminded students to “respect each other while you’re in the fishbowl” as well as to “have good, honest debate” about the issues (Patrick, Observation 2b). The teacher continued to stress active listening and respect throughout the fishbowl discussions, and students on both the inside and outside remained engaged in the task. In fact, I observed one student on the outside of the fishbowl bang his head on the desk periodically. He appeared frustrated by the participants’ comments, and it seemed like he was trying extremely hard not to comment. However, he respected the rules of the activity, he respected his classmates, and he remained quiet. Later, he admitted that it was indeed very hard to not express his own opinion during those moments. Furthermore, one of the students who emerged as a leader and guided a great deal of the conversation in the inner group was a student classified as SLD. The other students responded to his thoughts and ideas in a considerate and genuine manner, and he seemed comfortable expressing himself in front of his peers. Like the student behaviors observed in Rachel’s class, the behaviors of the students in Patrick’s class were also indicative of a climate of mutuality. Both parties, students classified with SLD as well as those with no classification, were active participants in their relationships. This type of activity has been found to result in increased self-esteem, improved achievement, and gratification in individuals’ connections with others (Lenz, 2016).

In their classrooms, Rachel and Patrick stressed the importance of peers working with one another in a respectful, mutual manner. They both incorporated group work into
their lessons—sometimes assigning students to specific roles as well as to specific groups. Regardless of the particular activity, however, students were consistently observed speaking to each other in respectful tones while engaging genuinely and fully in their interactions. In Patrick’s classes, a student classified as SLD emerged as an outspoken leader in the fishbowl activity while other students with identified needs assumed the role of writer and reporter. In Rachel’s classes, general education students demonstrated some of the most powerful examples of mutuality when they supported their peer with identified needs during a performance of Student Theater. The peer-to-peer relationships observed during the teachers’ lessons were aligned with the tenets of RCT, and they reduced the marginalization of typically oppressed groups—in this instance, students classified as SLD.

**Discussion**

As the findings reported in this chapter reveal, the relationships that Rachel and Patrick fostered with their students were built on mutuality and authenticity. Both were intentional in their relationships with students—demonstrating care and mutual empathy, relating to students authentically through their own experiences, and acknowledging that both the teacher’s and the student’s actions directly influence the relationship. They adopted a “power-with” rather than a “power-over” dynamic with their students and also cultivated positive and respectful peer-to-peer relationships through the implementation of collaborative classroom activities. As a result, the included students in Rachel’s and Patrick’s classes were embraced and respected despite their diverse learning needs.
Chapter Seven
Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Summary of Key Findings

Various instructional strategies and teacher behaviors have been identified as effective for fostering the success of students with identified needs (Marchant & Anderson 2012; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Worrell, 2008). In particular, advance organizers (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002), mnemonic instruction (Jitendra et al., 2004), and positive teacher-student relationships (Fan, 2012) contribute to students’ overall academic achievement and social well-being. While this body of research provides valuable insights into the ways general education teachers can better help their included students meet with success, little research has examined teachers’ beliefs and practices in a single-teacher model of inclusion—a model often employed in public schools. In order to address this gap in the literature, I investigated the beliefs, instructional practices, and classroom climate of two general education inclusion teachers working in a single-teacher context. My study was guided by the question: How do successful middle school general education inclusion teachers create classrooms that enable their students classified as having a Specific Learning Disability to succeed?

To investigate this question, I employed a qualitative case study. A case study research design allowed me to conduct an in-depth examination of the two successful general education teachers as they worked in the authentic context of their inclusive classrooms. Primary data sources consisted of results of a belief survey, responses to
three interviews, and notes from eight classroom observations for each participant. My analysis of the data led to the creation of rich portraits of these teachers and, in particular, of their beliefs, practices, and the inclusive classroom environments they created.

These portraits highlighted four key findings. First, the teachers in this study, Rachel and Patrick, expressed predominantly positive beliefs about inclusion as well as the included students in their classes. They valued students with identified needs, and they believed these students were capable of contributing to their general education peers’ learning. Furthermore, the teachers believed it was their responsibility to address the social-emotional needs as well as the academic needs of their students.

Second, although both teachers expressed a strong desire and willingness to help their students, they faced several challenges that made it difficult to achieve this goal. For example, they appreciated the guidance of Child Study Team members and other teacher colleagues, but since common planning time was no longer built into their schedules, finding time to collaborate with them was a challenge. Thus, while these individuals had expertise to share on the topic of special education, scheduling practices made it difficult for the inclusion teachers to benefit from their knowledge. Additionally, when Rachel and Patrick initially entered the teaching profession, they did not feel adequately prepared to work with the included students in their classes. They received little meaningful pre-service course work focused on special education instructional strategies or other practical information that could be applied in their inclusion classrooms. They also did not find value in the minimal number of in-service opportunities provided to them. Thus, they were compelled to acquire the necessary
skills and knowledge for inclusive teaching while actually engaging in this work. Compounding this, they faced challenges with the support personnel assigned to their inclusive classes. Paraprofessionals, rather than certified teachers, were assigned to their rooms, and they often lacked the skills necessary to effectively support students with identified needs. Paraprofessional assignments were also not consistent from one year to the next, and at times, the paraprofessionals were re-assigned to a different classroom mid-year.

The third key finding of this study is related to the instructional practices that Rachel and Patrick employed in their inclusion classrooms. Their lessons were fast-paced, highly-focused lessons designed to convey specific skills and knowledge. Lessons contained daily reviews of material, statements of instructional objectives, and opportunities for guided and independent practice. In addition to this, the teachers used similar instructional strategies, such as differentiation and multisensory instruction, to engage and address the needs of their included students. Specifically, they used modified assessments, how-to sheets, and a variety of multimedia tools to present their lessons. Some practices, such as the use of modified assessments, were implemented solely for students with identified needs, while others (e.g., multisensory instruction) were also offered to general education students because the teachers believed all students could benefit from these techniques. Rachel and Patrick also engaged their students by making their instruction relevant to the students’ own lives. They believed that, to help students better comprehend and retain the subject matter, they needed to connect their instruction to students’ interests and experiences.
Finally, Rachel and Patrick placed great importance on the relationships they cultivated with their students. In their classrooms, they fostered teacher-student relationships based on feelings of mutuality, authenticity, and respect. They accepted students’ differences and focused on their strengths to help them be successful, they took a genuine interest in the students’ lives, and they emphasized honesty in the classroom. The teachers not only nurtured growth-fostering interactions between themselves and their students; they also stressed positive interactions among the students. This was most apparent when students were required to engage in collaborative group activities. In these instances, teachers set the expectation that students treat one another with respect, listen and respond courteously to one another, and allow each person to be an active participant in the activity. In all observations, I witnessed positive interactions between teachers and students, as well as between the students themselves.

**Discussion**

The teachers in this study shared similar affirming beliefs about students with identified needs as well as the practice of inclusion itself, yet their success was not without challenges. In this section, I discuss four themes that emerged from the study’s findings: the identification of the relational aspects of teaching as a new definition of success; the teachers’ adoption of a social justice perspective as they enacted their work as inclusion teachers; the teachers’ ability to overcome challenges through their own self-efficacy; and the teachers’ adoption of a ‘whatever it takes’ approach to help their included students classified as SLD meet with success.
Success Redefined. Rachel and Patrick were nominated for inclusion in this study because their co-workers identified them as successful in working with students classified as SLD. Other than asking colleagues to consider students’ overall success in the classroom, I did not provide a definition of student or teacher success. As a result, individuals offered many different reasons for their belief that these teachers were successful. Some colleagues believed Rachel was successful working with included students because she was fun and creative, and she differentiated her lessons to meet individual student needs. However, they predominantly identified relational aspects of teaching as the reason for her success—her willingness to listen to her students, her genuine investment in their success, as well as her warm, approachable, and caring demeanor. Patrick’s colleagues attributed his success to the incorporation of multisensory instructional techniques, especially the use of technology, in his lessons, yet they more often identified his commitment to his students, his love for his craft, and the adoration that his students held for him as indicators of his success. Colleagues acknowledged that under their tutelage, students with identified needs gained self-confidence, attained a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning, and developed a new respect for themselves and others. It is clear that these teachers’ colleagues recognized the importance of students’ self-esteem as well as their social-emotional well-being as indicators of a teacher’s success.

Rachel’s and Patrick’s own beliefs about their success were surprisingly similar to the reasons put forth by their colleagues. While they recognized the importance of using various instructional practices to help their students, especially those with identified
needs, acquire necessary skills, they did not relate their practices to students’ academic success; rather, they spoke about the ways their practices enabled students to feel truly included in their inclusion classes, to feel confident, and to be active participants in their learning communities. Time and again, they emphasized the relational aspects of their profession and expressed the importance of social-emotional outcomes for their students. They stressed that their success was largely based on the rapport they nurtured with their students—a rapport built on a genuine interest in who the students were as individuals. Above all else, they identified RCT concepts of mutuality, respect, and authenticity among all the individuals in their classrooms as primary contributors to their overall success. Patrick’s mutual respect and empathy for students, for example, was evident in a story he relayed about a student who faced a myriad of challenges. At home, the student faced issues of abuse, drug use, and lack of support; in school, the student was typically disengaged from the lessons and behaved in a disruptive manner. Patrick displayed concern for the student as he worked tirelessly to build a sense of trust with him. Eventually, the student shared his own feelings and experiences with Patrick, allowing them to engage with one another in a mutually respectful and caring manner. Rachel displayed authenticity, or genuineness, in her relationships with students when she shared her own emotions and life experiences. She told students she struggled through some of her college courses, and that she continues to be a poor speller. She wanted students to realize that she has challenges of her own, and she is able to relate to them through her own personal experiences.
These relational indicators of success are antithetical to the strong focus on high academic standards put forth in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A primary goal of ESSA is to ensure that all students, particularly those in historically disadvantaged subgroups (e.g., minority and economically disadvantaged groups) have equal access to a high-quality education (NJDOE, ESSA, 2017). To support achievement of this goal, ESSA requires states to address college- and career-readiness skills through the implementation of rigorous state standards and the administration of high-stakes standardized assessments. In the current study, the teachers and their colleagues who nominated them, challenged this traditional definition of success. They identified social-emotional factors and the relational aspects of teaching—rather than conventional academic measures—as the primary determination of general education inclusion teachers’ success. Rachel and Patrick were nominated because they were respectful toward and genuine with their students, fostered students’ feelings of confidence, and promoted students’ ownership of their own learning. They were deemed successful because of the relationships they cultivated with their students—not because the students scored high on a standardized test—the measure of success endorsed by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE).

While the teachers’ and the nominators’ emphasis on social-emotional factors were not aligned with the NJDOE’s focus on student academic progress and achievement, these relational aspects of teaching actually served as the foundation for the students’ success. As highlighted in the literature on classroom climate, supportive teacher-student relationships can improve student satisfaction with school (Jiang, 2013),
enhance social-emotional well-being (Murray & Pianta, 2007), and ultimately increase student achievement (Allen et al., 2013; Wentzel, 1998). Effective inclusion teachers must possess knowledge of instructional strategies and techniques that can improve the academic achievement of students classified as SLD (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003), but this skill alone does not make a teacher successful. Teachers must first form positive relationships with their students—relationships characterized by warmth, caring, and familiarity (Hamre & Pianta, 2001)—so they can take on academic challenges. Peter focused on greeting his students each day at the classroom door; he said hello, asked how their day was going, and spoke briefly with them about events happening in their lives. He also sought and valued students’ honest opinions of specific activities, such as the fishbowl lesson, in order to make the lessons more meaningful for them. Rachel demonstrated care about her students’ emotional well-being; she was willing to devote classroom time for students to work out worrisome social issues so they could be better focused and engaged in classroom instruction. Both teachers primarily emphasized the relational aspects of teaching to nurture a secure and supportive classroom atmosphere—the foundation upon which the instructional aspects of teaching were then able to thrive.

Aside from components of direct instruction, Rachel and Patrick did not frequently implement strategies identified in the literature as effective for working with students classified as SLD. Rather, they chose their instructional approaches by first building relationships with their students and learning about their individual strengths and needs, and then implementing strategies they believed would be most beneficial for them. Rachel anticipated her students’ needs during her lesson planning and constantly asked
herself, “Will this kid be able to do it?” (Rachel, Interview #3). Similarly, Patrick planned his lessons to “level the playing field” (Patrick, Interview #2) for students with identified needs. Furthermore, both teachers planned for and modified their instruction because they believed it was the socially just thing to do for students with identified needs; they believed that, as inclusion teachers, it was their responsibility to meet the needs of all of their students. Thus, it seems that the teachers’ intent about the use of particular strategies—that is, their belief that accommodations and modifications are the just and right thing to do for students with identified needs—is as, if not more, important than the specific instructional strategy itself. Beliefs are likely to influence the behaviors of teachers in the classroom, and in this study, Rachel and Patrick chose to modify their instruction because they believed it was socially just to do so.

Rachel, Patrick, and their colleagues who nominated them for this study acknowledged their high regard for the human, interpersonal aspects of teaching and learning. While teacher beliefs and instructional practices are certainly factors in their success working with students with identified needs, teacher-student relationships emerged as the most important measure of general education inclusion teachers’ success. The findings of this study highlight the tremendous value in building a strong relational foundation with students—especially since supportive teacher-student relationships can increase student achievement (Allen et al., 2013; Wentzel, 1998)—an outcome clearly documented in the literature.

**Teaching from a Social Justice Perspective.** The findings of this study also suggest that Rachel and Patrick approached their work as inclusion teachers from a social
justice perspective; that is, they viewed disability as a human rights issue rather than an abnormality that must be fixed. They did not position students with identified needs as “others” nor did they consider them “less than” their general education peers. Rather, they respected and honored students’ individual differences and created a classroom environment that provided all students, including those with identified needs, equal access to the educational program. This was evident in the teachers’ words and actions throughout the study. For example, in interviews and on the belief surveys, Rachel and Patrick both expressed the conviction that students with identified needs can be positive contributors in inclusive classrooms. They recognized that these students may have some challenges, but they also believed they possess strengths that allow them to overcome their impairments. Rachel pointed out that a student might not be able to write an explanation but might be able to verbally explain a concept. Thus, she believed it was her responsibility to modify the assignment to match the student’s ability. Likewise, Patrick explained how he used graphic organizers and technology-based instruction to enable students with identified needs to engage in classroom assignments and activities.

Both teachers also modified the presentation of materials as well as their assessment methods. These teachers did not expect students with identified needs—students who often learn in a non-traditional manner—to “fit in” with the existing classroom structure. Instead, the teachers valued the differences of students with identified needs and structured their classrooms to enable them to be active, contributing members of the class. With their adoption of a social justice view of disability, Rachel and Patrick embraced, honored, and respected students’ individual differences as ordinary and
natural, rather than using their power and privilege to marginalize their students because they were “different”. This perspective endorses access and equity for all students—a stance that is endorsed by DSE scholars.

A DSE perspective is further evident in the way Rachel and Patrick regarded their inclusion practices. In their interviews, they stressed the belief that students with identified needs must truly be a part of the classroom. They used words like “belonging” and “ownership” to describe the way they wanted their included students to feel in their rooms, and it was these beliefs that prompted them to behave in particular ways. Specifically, Patrick reminded students to “work well together,” be respectful, and listen to one another in group activities such as the fishbowl assignment. When working in groups, each student had a specific role or responsibility to fulfill to ensure that all students were active class participants. Likewise, Rachel went out of her way to include all students in classroom activities. She did not want students with identified needs, or any student for that matter, to feel isolated and disrespected. Aligned with the DSE goal of reducing marginalization (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004), Rachel purposefully structured her Student Theater program so students with identified needs could feel comfortable participating in this experience. She considered the strengths of each of her students and consequently created a role to fit each of their needs. At times, she practiced speaking roles ahead of time with students, and she constantly encouraged and supported them during the production. In their classrooms, students with identified needs were truly included—not simply because they were educated in a general education classroom, but rather because of the teacher’s adoption of a DSE perspective. Again, because Rachel
and Patrick believed disability and inclusion is a social justice and human rights issue, they transformed their inclusion practices to provide access and equity for all students.

DSE scholars argue that societal structures, including those that exist in schools, often marginalize students with identified needs (Taylor, 2011), and it is clear that Rachel and Patrick made great efforts to eliminate potential barriers. They emphasized their desire for students with identified needs to feel comfortable, confident, and included—to be valued and participating members of their classroom communities—a principal goal of the inclusion movement (Lalvani, 2013). It is this kind of authentic inclusive environment built on the principles of social justice—the type of inclusive classrooms that Rachel and Patrick created—that promote the success of included students classified as SLD.

**Overcoming Challenges through Self-Efficacy.** In both the literature on teacher beliefs and in this study, teachers identified challenges they believed they faced as inclusion teachers. In this study, difficulty finding time for collaboration with colleagues and a lack of consistency of personnel emerged as two key challenges. Rachel and Patrick acknowledged a lack of time to collaborate with colleagues as a challenge to their work as inclusion teachers—a theme that emerged in the literature (Lombard et al., 1998; Olson et al., 1997). They articulated the importance of collaboration with colleagues, including teachers, Child Study Team members, guidance counselors, administrators, and the paraprofessionals assigned to their rooms. Collaboration between teachers who shared the same group of students was especially important for them to gain insight about their students’ performance in other classes and subject areas. They relied on colleagues
for advice and guidance as well as assistance with instructional strategies that are best suited for teaching students with identified needs. They valued others’ knowledge and expertise, and they were not hesitant to ask for help. Research has shown the benefits of structuring common time for special and general education teachers to collaborate in this way (Titone, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2003), but team time was eliminated from their daily schedules several years earlier. Rachel and Patrick expressed their frustration with this issue multiple times during interviews.

A lack of consistency in support personnel emerged as another challenge to inclusion. In many of their inclusion classes, Rachel and Patrick were provided with the support of another adult to specifically assist their included students with identified needs. In past years, Rachel and Patrick were assigned either a special education or general education teacher to work with their included students, but in more recent years, paraprofessionals were usually assigned to this position. They claimed that the paraprofessionals typically possessed little or no knowledge or training to work in such a role. They clarified that most paraprofessionals merely assisted students with organizational skills, helped them write assignments into their agendas, and ensured students remained on-task in the classroom. Unlike certified teachers, most paraprofessionals were not familiar with the content of the curriculum, and Rachel and Patrick needed to provide them with constant supervision and direction for how to help the students. Adding to this challenge, even when they were fortunate enough to have a knowledgeable and capable paraprofessional assigned to their rooms, these individuals were often moved mid-year or reassigned to a different classroom the following year.
This inconsistency in paraprofessional assignments disrupted their classroom routines and required both teachers and students to spend time establishing new relationships.

While Rachel and Patrick believed paraprofessionals could potentially assume some of the responsibility for addressing the individual needs of included students, many lacked the ability to effectively do so. Thus, they preferred the support of a fully certified teacher to that of a paraprofessional primarily because certified teachers possessed greater depth of knowledge and skills in the field of education. It is curious, though, that neither teacher articulated a preference to work with a certified special education teacher rather than a general education teacher even though special education teachers were specifically trained to work with students with identified needs. Throughout this study, Rachel and Patrick expressed an eagerness to work with and learn from their special education colleagues, yet they never advocated to have a special education teacher instruct alongside them in a co-teaching situation. According to their responses on a belief survey, Rachel and Patrick indicated that they felt extremely comfortable and skilled teaching students with identified needs. In fact, this score was the highest self-rating score on the survey for both teachers with each ranking him/herself 3.9 out of 4 possible points. On this survey, they also expressed very strong feelings that their schools’ practices supported their work with inclusion. They told me that their colleagues’ advice and guidance improved their work with inclusion, and they also expressed their belief that their years of experience as inclusion teachers helped them become more successful working with students classified as SLD—a claim that is supported by research (e.g., Casebolt & Hodge, 2010; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006a).
These findings are a direct reflection of Rachel’s and Patrick’s strong self-efficacy. Perhaps their confidence in their own knowledge and skills working with students with identified needs lessened their felt need to have a special education co-teacher beside them and also enabled them to overcome the challenges of inconsistent and often ill-prepared support personnel as well as a lack of collaboration time.

**Whatever It Takes.** Perhaps the most striking trait that enabled Rachel and Patrick to meet with success as inclusion teachers was their adoption of a “Whatever It Takes” attitude. They did not enter the teaching profession with a great deal of preparation to teach in an inclusion setting. While they were unable to recall the specific number and type of special education courses they were required to take during their undergraduate teacher preparation programs, they reported that their coursework did not adequately equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to teach students with identified needs. They recalled learning about the various classification categories for students with identified needs, classroom management techniques, and basic strategies for modifying assessments for their included students. However, neither recalled learning much about specific instructional techniques or strategies for working in an inclusion classroom. Additionally, they reported receiving little to no additional training on inclusion once they entered the teaching profession.

As discussed above, Rachel and Patrick also faced multiple challenges actually implementing the work of inclusion. The loss of structured planning time and the employment of paraprofessionals rather than fully certified teachers to support their included students presented challenges to their success. Rather than allow this situation
to defeat them, though, they chose instead to rise above these issues and make every effort to help their students with identified needs be successful. Rachel and Patrick took it upon themselves to meet with their colleagues before and after school, during their free periods, and at lunch time whenever possible. They passed notes, used text messaging, and sent emails as a means to communicate with and prepare the paraprofessionals assigned to their rooms. The teachers understood the value of collaborating with their colleagues, and they were determined to do this for the success of their students.

Rachel and Patrick also expressed a willingness to try whatever strategies were necessary to help their students succeed. They educated themselves about inclusion practices by conducting their own research online and by ascertaining the strategies other teachers use to support the needs of their included students. They constantly sought the guidance of their colleagues who worked in the field of special education, seeking advice on strategies and techniques that work best for the individual students in their classes. Their willingness to employ suggested strategies was evident in the varied approaches observed in their classrooms, such as multi-sensory techniques, cooperative learning activities, and the use of differentiated instruction strategies. They were also willing to implement techniques such as fishbowl conversations and Student Theater in a “trial and error” approach. They were eager to experiment with new techniques if they believed they might possibly benefit their students—especially students with identified needs.

Rachel’s and Patrick’s readiness to do whatever necessary to help their students succeed was reflected in the sentiments they expressed to me during their interviews. In Interview 1, for example, Patrick stated:
The ultimate thing is success for the student. You’re always trying to learn something, but you’re also trying to make sure that the kid is constantly growing. And I don’t think anything in my career has made me say ‘what a waste this is’! It’s always trying to tweak it and improve. You have to kinda reinvent yourself . . . and I don’t think you’ll ever be done (Patrick, Interview #1, lines 165-171).

Rachel’s words also reflected a willingness to work hard and put in the necessary time to enable her to be a better inclusion teacher. She told me:

I put in a ton of extra hours at home . . . It’s hard because sometimes I know I need to get this done so my job is better at school and the class goes better. It goes smoother. And the kids feel better about what they’re doing. I put the time in, and I’m like, oh, yeah. I’ll just try that (Rachel, Interview #3, lines 553-558).

While Rachel and Patrick possessed affirming views of inclusion and the students with identified needs in their classrooms, they also acknowledged that the practice of inclusion presented challenges for them. However, as evidenced by the examples above, they would not allow themselves to be defeated by these obstacles. Instead, they approached their role as inclusion teachers with a “Whatever It Takes” attitude, and this was the key that allowed them and their students with identified needs to meet with success in their inclusive classrooms.

**Implications**

Based on the results of my study and my review of the literature, I have drawn numerous implications for practice, research, and policy. I discuss these below.
**Implications for Practice.** The practice of inclusion presents challenges to those responsible for educating students with identified needs, and in many instances, these challenges center on the organizational structures of schools. Because inclusive practices require both general and special education teachers to assume responsibility for the education of students with identified needs, it is essential that they be given time during the school day to collaborate with each other. Teachers need time to collaborate on lesson plan development, effective instructional strategies, lesson plan implementation, and classroom management strategies (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). General education teachers can benefit from the expertise of certified special education teachers not only to learn about the needs of their included students classified as SLD but also to learn how best to modify and adapt their instruction to meet these needs. Simply placing students with identified needs into inclusion classrooms without considering the needs of the general education teachers who instruct them is counter-productive and not in the best interests of either the teachers or their included students. Thus, school principals must build common planning time into the master schedule so teachers can plan engaging and meaningful educational experiences for successful student learning. While it would be helpful to schedule this on a daily basis, providing a common planning period at least once a week would be a beneficial first step.

The organizational structures of middle schools also need to be configured to support teachers in addressing the social-emotional needs of adolescents. Because strong teacher-student relationships can positively influence student engagement, student achievement, and overall student well-being, it is important to structure schools in such a
way that these relationships can be nurtured. Flexible scheduling, rather than fixed time scheduling, for example, has been shown to foster strong teacher-student relationships (Hackmann et al., 2002; National Middle School Association, 2010). Flexible scheduling includes models such as block scheduling, alternate day scheduling, and rotating schedules which typically allow for longer class periods—thus, providing more one-on-one time between teachers and students. Advisory programs, another configuration which has been successful in strengthening connections between teachers and students, provide opportunities for adults to meet regularly with students to offer academic and social-emotional support (Shulkind & Foote, 2009). Yet another school structure that has been shown to foster strong teacher-student relationships is the formation of interdisciplinary teams—small teams of teachers that work with a common group of students. In this school-within-a school model, the larger school community is divided into smaller communities of teachers and students. The purpose is to enable students to develop a sense of connectedness by structuring additional time for teachers and students to get to know one another better (Murray & Pianta, 2007). These smaller communities also establish a safe and supportive environment for all learners—a type of environment that is especially important for students with identified needs. Considering the myriad of physiological, emotional, and social changes that adolescents undergo during their middle school years, it is critical that every student has at least one supportive adult upon whom to rely (Ellerbock & Kiefer, 2014; Hinebauch, 2002), and the models described in this section have the potential to facilitate these types of positive teacher-student interactions.
The second implication for practice is related to pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs. Rachel and Patrick, like many teachers in prior studies (e.g., Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Fuchs, 2010), expressed a lack of preparedness for working with students with identified needs because they received little to no formal coursework during their teacher preparation programs. Learning the formal definitions of each of the classification categories and examining the laws surrounding IDEA—some of the topics of the course work they did receive—did little to prepare them for the actual work of instructing students in their inclusion classrooms. General education teachers need a better understanding of the knowledge, skills, and instructional strategies they can apply directly in their own classrooms to address the needs of their included students. In other words, they need practical knowledge that can be directly applied to their daily practice. Teacher preparation programs should therefore include course work focused on methods for adapting and modifying instruction (e.g., multi-sensory instructional strategies, cooperative learning activities), alternate assessment strategies, classroom management techniques, and other topics specifically focused on addressing the needs of included students. Since specific elements of instruction can result in improved educational outcomes for students classified as SLD (Chard et al., 2002; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011), teacher preparation programs are remiss if they do not include such topics in their course work for pre-service general education teachers. This would prepare them to more effectively instruct the students with identified needs being placed in their inclusion classes.
Since teacher beliefs are likely to influence their behaviors in the classroom (Kagan, 1992), it is important to provide pre-service and in-service teachers with opportunities to reflect on and challenge their beliefs about ability and disability. For example, do they believe that students with identified needs have deficits within them that need to be fixed, or do they believe that disability occurs only as individuals come into contact with oppressive societal structures? Their beliefs about the nature of disability, in conjunction with their beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in an inclusion setting, are critical to their ultimate classroom practices. If teachers believe students with identified needs are “broken” and “less than” their general education peers, and they do not believe they should be responsible for instructing them, then students with identified needs can be marginalized in the general education classroom. However, if pre-service and in-service teachers are given time to reflect on and discuss the implications of their perspectives, it may reveal to them how a change to a more social view of disability can lead to more effective teaching practices in their inclusive classrooms.

It is also critical to provide pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to foster supportive teacher-student relationships since these relationships are likely to result in positive outcomes for students. Pre-service teachers must come to understand the centrality of teachers’ relationships with their students, must explore their own biases and beliefs about students with identified needs and come to respect them and value their presence in classes, and must be prepared to convey their respect, fairness and high expectations for student performance. They must learn listening skills as well as
methods for communicating their genuine interest in students’ lives. While these skills may seem inconsequential, and not worthy of inclusion in a formal teacher preparation program, it is important to remember that teaching is a relational activity. Positive teacher-student interactions can result in higher student engagement, increased academic achievement, and improved peer relationships (e.g., Quin, 2017)—desired outcomes for all students, including those with identified needs. Because teacher-student relationships impact student success, it is essential that teachers know how to engage in rapport-building behaviors, and teacher preparation programs must assume the responsibility for nurturing pre-service teachers’ understanding of the importance of relationships, desire to build relationships with their students, and skills for doing so.

Finally, it is important that school administrators and others who participate in teacher hiring practices not only consider prospective teacher’s credentials, but also give serious consideration to teacher candidate’s beliefs. In this study, Rachel’s and Patrick’s educational backgrounds varied notably. Patrick earned two master’s degrees—one in the field of school administration and another in the field of developmental disabilities. Rachel, on the other hand, earned 30 credits beyond her bachelor’s degree and none of these courses were in the field of special education. Nevertheless, both were identified as successful inclusion teachers—suggesting that other factors, such as their beliefs, may also contribute to their success as inclusion teachers. Both expressed overwhelmingly positive beliefs about inclusion and the included students in their classrooms, and they articulated the importance of establishing warm and supportive relationships with their students. These beliefs are critical to the work they enact in their inclusive classrooms,
and such aspects of their candidacy should not be overlooked. Administrators must take the time to inquire about prospective teachers’ beliefs about teaching, learning, and the practice of inclusion when making hiring decisions. Questions can include inquiries about teachers’ willingness to make modifications to their classroom instruction, the nature of their relationships with students, and their beliefs about the abilities of students with identified needs. Similar deliberation should be given when administrators make decisions about the general educators who are assigned to inclusion classrooms.

**Implications for Research.** Findings from this study contribute to our understanding of the beliefs and practices of successful general education inclusion teachers. At the same time, it was limited in several ways. First, the sample was limited to only two teachers who taught the same subject and were employed in the same school district. This design did not allow me to determine whether Rachel and Patrick shared so many instructional approaches because they taught the same content and they had been prepared in similar social studies certification programs, or simply because they are both good teachers of students with identified learning needs. Did they express similar beliefs because they worked in the same district and were originally hired because of their belief system, or because they are good teachers of students with identified needs? Research with a larger, more representative sample of middle school teachers teaching various content areas in different districts and schools would be needed to address such questions. Second, neither parents nor students with identified needs were included in the nomination process. Future research should include these stakeholder groups since their perceptions of teacher success may be different from those of the nominators in this
study. Including parents and students in research would bring their voices—voices of key stakeholders in the practice of inclusion—into the conversation. An additional limitation of this study involves my role in the school district in which the study took place. Even though I did not directly supervise Rachel and Patrick, I did indeed have authority over them, and one must consider whether my position as Assistant Superintendent influenced the teachers’ responses on their belief survey and interviews. For example, were they being completely truthful about questions related to school support and the challenges they faced as inclusion teachers? Did they temper their answers so they did not appear too critical of district practices? Finally, while the purpose of this study was not to determine whether students truly met with success in their inclusive classrooms, this is an important consideration. Future research should examine the extent to which identified successful general education inclusion teachers have a positive effect on academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students classified as SLD.

Future research should also consider varied models of inclusion to determine whether teacher beliefs and practices differ according to the particular model implemented in their schools. Much of the research on the beliefs and practices of general education inclusion teachers is focused on a co-teaching model of inclusion, yet other service delivery models, such as the single-teacher model, are more commonly used in schools across the United States. Moreover, even when a co-teaching model is employed, the actual roles of the general and special education teachers vary from class to class; thus, this model does not always look the same in different contexts (Scruggs et
al., 2007). In some of these service delivery models, general education teachers are primarily responsible for educating their included students while in other models, this responsibility is shared with a special education teacher. Considering these differences, it is possible that general education teachers assume vastly divergent perspectives about the practice of inclusion. Research is needed to examine the impact of these variations in instructional models.

In the current study, each of the two identified successful inclusion teachers had approximately 16 to 18 years of experience in the teaching profession. They felt ill-prepared to work in inclusion classrooms, and they stated they primarily learned about the work of inclusion while “on the job” as opposed to learning about it in their formal teacher preparation programs. Since they attended their undergraduate programs nearly two decades prior to the study, I wonder if current teacher education programs better prepare general education teachers to work in inclusive settings. Do novice teachers now feel better equipped to work with students with identified needs? Also, do novice teachers emphasize and recognize the value of the relational aspects of teaching in their inclusion work? Future research should consider a focus on novice rather than experienced teachers to determine if they experience their inclusion work differently.

Finally, research is needed to determine how relationships between teachers and students classified as SLD are developed. Do these relationships develop differently than those formed between teachers and general education students? Do students classified as SLD have unique needs that impact the formation of relationships with their teachers? It would be beneficial to determine what learning opportunities most effectively result in
the development of positive and supportive relationships between pre-service and in-service teachers and their students classified as SLD. Since students classified as SLD are at greater risk of experiencing academic, social, and emotional difficulties, teacher-student relationships are a critical determinant of their success (Roorda et al., 2011); thus, it is imperative to have a better understanding of the nature of their relationships with teachers.

**Implications for Policy.** The first implication of this study for policy makers is that they should expand beyond the traditional, and very narrow, focus on standardized test scores as the primary measure of success. Under ESSA, students in grades 3-11 in the state of New Jersey are required to participate in The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing in math, reading/language arts, and science, and to successfully pass the Algebra I and grade 10 English Language Arts PARCC in order to graduate from high school. Teachers are held accountable for the achievement of every student, including those with identified needs, and schools are penalized if students fail to make measurable progress on PARCC from one year to the next. While the NJDOE claims that the purpose of PARCC results is to improve educational outcomes for students, I assert that these high-stakes and high-stress assessments are not the only way to measure student success. As the educators in my study explained, student success involves measures of student confidence, feelings of comfort and acceptance within a classroom, and measures of students’ overall well-being. Teachers foster these social-emotional student outcomes through supportive teacher-student relationships and the establishment of a positive classroom climate. The social-
emotional aspects of students’ school experiences are equally important metrics of student success since these factors influence students’ levels of academic engagement and achievement (Quin, 2017). While standardized test scores will most likely remain a component of New Jersey’s accountability system due to federal policy requirements, policy makers must commit to incorporating students’ social-emotional development into existing definitions of student success.

The other policy implication from this study is that general education teachers should receive more intensive preparation to enable them to work effectively with students with identified needs. Ideally, all teachers would be required to have an additional endorsement or certificate in the field of special education. With nearly 62% of students with identified needs being educated in general education classrooms for at least 80% of their day (USDOE, NCES, 2016), it is highly likely that general education teachers will have these students in their classrooms. Yet, research shows time and again that general education inclusion teachers—those educating students with identified needs—feel under-prepared to work with these students (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006b; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Hwang & Evans, 2011). Thus, it behooves policy makers to ensure that everything possible is done to adequately prepare general education teachers for this task. In fact, the NJDOE recently mandated that all teachers in the state must receive the equivalent of six credits of Special Education coursework in order to become certified teachers. While not ideal, this new requirement will certainly improve the preparation of all teachers to teach students with identified needs. At the same time, it does not mandate any practicum hours working with students with identified needs in
schools. This would be another way to enable general education teachers to gain the knowledge, support, and experience needed to work with students with identified needs. All teachers across the country need to have much more substantive preparation for teaching these students than most currently have.

Conclusion

I conducted an in-depth case study investigation of two identified successful general education inclusion teachers to examine the beliefs and practices that led to their success. What emerged from my findings was a picture of two teachers who held overwhelmingly positive views of inclusion and the students with identified needs that they educated. Rachel and Patrick respected the unique learning needs of their included students, and they approached the work of inclusion with the belief that they must do anything and everything possible to help their included students meet with success in their classrooms. Whether it was the implementation of a specific instructional strategy or a necessary accommodation, they were committed to helping students with identified needs become active and contributing members of their classroom community. Through the development of mutual and authentic relationships, they created a safe and supportive classroom environment that invited students to take ownership of their own learning. Their inclusive classrooms were not simply places for students with identified needs to be educated; rather, they were true inclusive settings that honored, valued, and respected each and every student for their individual differences. To reiterate the philosophy of DSE scholars, the difference between mainstreaming and inclusion is like “the difference between visiting a classroom versus having full membership in it” (Lalvani, 2013, p. 15).
It is clear that Rachel and Patrick created socially just, authentic inclusive classrooms in which all students had full membership.

It is critical to create equity and success for all students — especially those with identified needs — in inclusion classrooms. The success of this, however, depends to a great extent on the beliefs and practices of the general education inclusion teachers assigned to these roles. Because teacher beliefs are likely to influence their work in the classroom, it is vital for general education inclusion teachers to possess positive beliefs about inclusion and to value the social-emotional well-being of students. This study also suggests that teachers must view inclusion as an instance of social justice — a practice that values student differences without labeling or stigmatizing them. It is challenging, however to transform and shape teachers’ beliefs, and this fact further underscores the importance of providing relevant and meaningful pre-service and in-service opportunities focused on preparing excellent inclusion teachers. As stated previously, teachers need time to reflect on their beliefs and to understand how their beliefs impact the students in their classrooms. Adolescents, especially those with identified needs, need teachers who create a safe, accepting space that allows them to be themselves and genuinely interact with their teachers and peers. These teachers not only benefit students with identified needs; they benefit all students. It is time for educators and policy makers to come together and commit to transforming the structures of inclusive practices and teacher education programs to ensure a socially just and equitable education for all students.
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Appendix A

Interview Guides

Interview #1 (Rachel and Patrick)

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<th>Central Focus</th>
<th>Potential Probes</th>
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<td>Your colleagues nominated you as a successful inclusion teacher so I’m interested both in what you do as well as how you have grown into this role.</td>
<td>Do you see yourself this way—as a teacher who is successful working with students classified as SLD? If so, tell me about that. What kinds of things are you thinking about when you say you are successful? What do you think you do that makes you so successful? Probe for specific examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Your colleagues nominated you as a successful inclusion teacher working with students classified as SLD. What do you think your colleagues had in mind in identifying you this way?</td>
<td>Probes may include a description of a typical day (e.g., What did you set up ahead of time? What modifications and/or accommodations might I see? How are students grouped in the classroom during your lesson? What instructional practices might I observe?)</td>
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<td>2. If I were to see you at work in your classroom, what would I see?</td>
<td>What are you trying to accomplish in your classroom in terms of inclusion?</td>
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<td>3. Think back to when you were first teaching and you had students classified as SLD in your classroom. Describe for me what I may have seen in your classroom at that time.</td>
<td>Now, think about your classroom today. How would you say your classroom practices have evolved? How has your inclusive classroom community developed over the years? Explain that to me.</td>
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<td>- Help me understand what has influenced these changes (e.g., life experiences, formal preparation, in-service opportunities).</td>
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Interview #2 (Rachel)

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<th>Central Focus</th>
<th>Potential Probes</th>
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In the first part of the interview, I’d like to review some of the things we discussed during our initial interview, and I’d also like to talk to you about my visit to your classroom. Then, in the second part of the interview, I would like to learn about your successes and challenges working with SLD students.

1. During our first interview, you told me about Student Theater, and you explained that you sometimes write parts—like rocks or trees—into your story. As you said, “It has nothing to do with the story, but they are part of the story. You know, they feel included then”. Can you tell me more about this feeling of inclusion? Perhaps give me some other examples of including students with SLD in your classroom.

2. Based on discussions during our first interview, it seems that you make modifications in your classroom even though—as you said—you were never taught how to do that. Am I getting that right? Can you help me understand how you learned to make these modifications?

3. There is something that really stuck out for me during our first interview as well as during my observations of your teaching, and I’m going to refer to that as ‘storytelling’.

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.
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- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.
Whether it is Student Theater, parodies of songs, an art gallery, doodling class notes, or the Westward Expansion Project, I get the impression that storytelling is a large part of your instructional practice. Yet, at one point in the interview, you said, “I’m not entertaining you (students) everyday”. Can you comment on this?

4. During my classroom observations, I noticed students helping and supporting one another numerous times. For example, when one student was reluctant to sing a chant, the others jumped in and sang it along with him. To what do you attribute this behavior?

5. I also noticed that you paired up students for the Art Gallery activity. Tell me about your thought process for choosing student partners or groups.

6. Now, I’m going to shift focus away from this specific lesson and ask you to take a broader look at your teaching career. I would like you to think about one of your greatest successes when working with a student classified as SLD. Describe this for me.

7. Now, think about one of your most challenging experiences working with included students. Describe that for me.
8. Once or twice during our first interview, you mentioned ‘flying by the seat of your pants’ and going to ‘plan b’ if something doesn’t work. Talk to me about that a little more. Perhaps give me an example of that.

9. You also said to me, “I don’t want them to rush and give me garbage just because I need it on (certain) date.” Help me to understand your thinking behind this statement.

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.
Interview #2 (Patrick)

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<td>In the first part of the interview, I’d like to review some of the things we discussed during our initial interview, and I’d also like to talk to you about my visit to your classroom. Then, in the second part of the interview, I would like to learn about your successes and challenges working with SLD students.</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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10. During our first interview, you stated that one strategy does not work for all students. In fact, you said, “It is not one size fits all”. You also used the word ‘arsenal’ quite frequently. Can you give me some specific examples of the tools in your arsenal—the strategies—that you use with your students with SLD?

11. You also mentioned your use of Google Drive during our first interview. You told me that you use it nearly every day. Can you talk to me about how you use this specifically with your students classified with Specific Learning Disabilities?

12. When we spoke last time, you talked to me about your goals for the SLD students in your classroom. You said that your main goal is NOT for students to learn Social Studies content. Your larger goal is more lofty. For example, you want students to learn how to get information; to learn how to...
work in a peer group; to feel part of the group. How do you achieve this?

13. During my first classroom observation, you put students into groups of 3, and they were instructed to develop a definition of slavery. At my last observation, you conducted a fish bowl activity and students again were placed into groups. Can you talk to me about your grouping practices? What influences your decisions about who to group with whom?

14. During my second round of observations, students were involved in an activity that included 8 different stations. I believe I got the gist of the assignment, but can you take some time to explain it to me?

15. Now, I’m going to shift focus away from this specific lesson and ask you to take a broader look at your teaching career. I would like you to think about one of your greatest successes when working with a student classified as SLD. Describe this for me.

16. Now, think about one of your most challenging experiences working with included students. Describe that for me.

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<td>Probe for more specific examples and descriptions.</td>
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<td>What do you think was the key to your success with this particular student?</td>
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<td>What made it so challenging?</td>
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<td>What did you do in response to this?</td>
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17. I really enjoyed watching the fish bowl activity. Talk to me about that goal for your lesson.
Interview #3 (Rachel)

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<th>Central Focus</th>
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<td>In the first part of the interview, I’d like to review some of the things we discussed in our past interviews, and I’d also like to talk to you about some of things I observed during my classroom visits. Then, in the next part of the interview, I would like to hear your perspective on how you have become successful working with students classified as SLD.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. At our last interview, I asked you to tell me about a particularly challenging situation you experienced as an inclusion teacher. You told me about working with one particular student who wasn’t completely honest with you and how you found that to be frustrating. Can you tell me about any other types of challenges you faced as an inclusion teacher—ones that are NOT related to interactions with your students?</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. During one of my observations, I noticed you read aloud the questions included in the Zaption video. Tell me about your thought process for reading the questions to the students rather than having the students read the questions themselves.</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. You have a paraprofessional in the class that I observed. Describe for me the nature of your interactions with her as they relate to classroom instruction, as well as the role the paraprofessional plays in your room.</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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4. One colleague that nominated you spoke about your ‘respect for individuality’. What do you think your colleague meant by this? Another colleague believes you are successful working with SLD students, in part, because you are ‘flexible’. Can you explain what you think your colleague means by that?

5. Based on our discussions and my observations of your teaching, it seems that respect between the students, as well as respect between you (the teacher) and your students, is an important part of your classroom culture. Does this seem accurate?

6. Talk to me about how you developed the classroom communities that I observed. How do you create an inclusive climate in your classroom?

7. There are two responses in your survey about which I would like to learn more. You agreed with the statement that says ‘students without disabilities can benefit when a student with a significant disability is included in the class’. Can you explain your thinking behind this?

You also agreed with the statement that says you believe you can make a difference in the life of a student who has a

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.
disability’. What does that difference look like?

8. What aspects of your personal or professional experience have been most important in helping you become effective in working with students classified as SLD?

- Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.
Interview #3 (Patrick)

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<td>In the first part of the interview, I’d like to review some of the things we discussed in our past interviews, and I’d also like to talk to you about some of things I observed during my classroom visits. Then, in the next part of the interview, I would like to hear your perspective on how you have become successful working with students classified as SLD.</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<td>9. At our last interview, you told me about your struggles as a traveling teacher and how that challenged you and impacted your work with students. Now that you’re consistently in one school, is there anything else that you find particularly challenging—or that cause obstacles—in your work with students with SLD? And I’m interested in things that are NOT directly related to your interactions with your students.</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<td>10. During one of my observations, you provided a graphic organizer for the students to use for the Enlightenment Gallery Walk. You also mentioned the use of graphic organizers during one of our interviews. Can you give me some examples of graphic organizers you use and also how you use them in your lessons?</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. You have a paraprofessional in the class that I observed. Describe for me the nature of your interactions with her as they relate to classroom instruction, as well as the role the</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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<td>12. You told me that you believe the <strong>skills</strong> are more important than the <strong>content</strong>. How do you differentiate your lessons for students with SLD to ensure that they learn important skills?</td>
<td><strong>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Based on our discussions and some of your comments, it seems that respect between the students, as well as the relationship between you (the teacher) and your students, is an important part of your classroom culture. Does this seem accurate?</td>
<td><strong>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Talk to me about how you developed the classroom communities that I observed. How do you create an inclusive climate in your classroom?</td>
<td><strong>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</strong></td>
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<td>15. There are two responses in your survey about which I would like to learn more. You agreed with the statement that says ‘students who have disabilities can be positive contributors to general education classes’. Can you explain your thinking behind this? You disagreed with the following statement: “If a classroom teacher does not want to teach a particular child with an IEP, the class placement should change to another teacher who is willing to teach the child”. Can you tell me more about that?</td>
<td><strong>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What aspects of your personal or professional experience have been most important in helping you become effective in working with students classified as SLD?</td>
<td>• Ask appropriate follow-up questions to address the participants’ emerging responses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey
(Adapted from the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, 2002)

This survey is designed to gather information regarding your beliefs toward and comfort with the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. Thank you for your responses.

Name: ___________________________                 School: ___________________________

Certification area: _______________________________

Subject you currently teach: _______________________

Grade level you currently teach: ____________

Years teaching experience: ____________

Highest degree earned: ___________________________

Number of college courses taken related to special education: ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course topic</th>
<th>Date course was taken</th>
<th>Location where course was taken</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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Number of in-service programs attended related to special education: ____________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-service topic</th>
<th>Date in-service was attended</th>
<th>Length of in-service program (ex. 3 days for 2 hours per day)</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>
Check the box below the most accurately reflects your opinion and belief:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I believe that:</th>
<th>YES, I agree</th>
<th>SOMETIME</th>
<th>NO, I don’t agree</th>
<th>I JUST DON’T KNOW!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Every student, regardless of disability, should be assigned to and be instructed in general education classes.</td>
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<td>2. Students who have disabilities can be positive contributors to general education classes.</td>
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<td>3. Any student, and all students, can learn in the general education classroom.</td>
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<td>4. Students without disabilities can benefit when a student with a significant disability is included in the class.</td>
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<td>5. A student with multiple disabilities can benefit from and successfully achieve IEP objectives in a general education class.</td>
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<td>6. Teachers with extensive special education training should NOT be the only ones to deliver special education services.</td>
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<td>7. A general education classroom teacher can deliver special instruction to students who have IEPs as a part of the general lesson.</td>
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<td>8. If a classroom teacher does not want to teach a particular child with an IEP, the class placement should change to another teacher who is willing to teach the child.</td>
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<td>9. When a special education teacher is assigned to deliver services in a general education class, it has a positive impact on the whole class.</td>
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<td>10. Special educators are equipped to teach general education students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I am aware of my school’s philosophy about including students with disabilities.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
12. Our school’s administration would support teachers working together to include students with disabilities.

13. The staff in our school feel positively about including students with disabilities

I believe that:  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES, I agree</th>
<th>SOME-TIMES</th>
<th>NO, I don’t agree</th>
<th>I JUST DON’T KNOW!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. Staff members in our school are encouraged to collaborate and support all students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. In our building, students who have disabilities feel welcome and participate in all aspects of school life.</td>
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<td>16. I feel comfortable including students with disabilities in the general education classroom.</td>
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<td>17. I am adequately prepared to deliver instruction to a wide variety of learners using the general education curriculum as a base for instruction.</td>
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<td>18. I am willing to collaborate with other teachers.</td>
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<td>19. I feel comfortable and able to supervise and support the staff assigned to my class.</td>
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<td>20. I am comfortable using technology (computers or adaptive equipment) to support the instruction of a wide variety of learners.</td>
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<td>21. I can adequately assess the progress and performance of most students who have IEPs.</td>
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<td>22. I can make instructional and curriculum accommodations for children with IEPs.</td>
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<td>23. I have the time to collaborate with other teachers when needed.</td>
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<td>24. I am willing to change and improve my instructional style to be able to reach more students.</td>
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<td>25. I feel that I can make a difference in the life of a student who has a disability.</td>
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Appendix C

Emails regarding survey

Verizon Message Center
From: Carol Quirk <cquirk@mcie.org> To: "natlac@verizon.net" natlac@verizon.net
Subject: Re: Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey
Sunday, Mar 22 at 5:05 PM

Hi Natalie:

Yes, by removing the sections you mentioned, you are not altering the essential elements of the survey.
I don't know if you noticed, but the first 5 questions are beliefs about students, 5 what they think about teacher practices, then 5 about their school, then 10 about their own beliefs. It is nice ways to disaggregate if you are making comparisons between schools or before/after an intervention to see what changed.

Best of luck! Carol

Carol Quirk, Ed.D.
CoExecutive Director, Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education Executive Team Member, the SWIFT Center

On Mar 22, 2015, at 12:20 PM, "natlac@verizon.net" <natlac@verizon.net> wrote:

Dear Carol,

Thank you for allowing me to use the Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey. As I stated in my earlier email, the questions seem to match my study perfectly! Is it okay for me to remove the initial identifying questions as well as the last three open-ended questions using only the 25 survey statements?
I am very happy to cite MCIE in my dissertation, and I will definitely send you a copy of my dissertation when it's completed.

Thank you again. I truly appreciate it.

Best, Natalie

On 03/19/15, Carol Quirk <cquirk@mcie.org> wrote:

Hello Natalie:
Yes, Marcia did use our survey, and we have used it extensively as a self-assessment tool. Since teachers complete it for themselves, there is no reliability to obtain. We have not conducted a validity study, unfortunately. You are welcome to use it. I’ve attached the pdf and a fillable form. I ask that you cite MCIE and I would love to have a copy of your dissertation when done! I’m sorry that we don’t have any additional data on the tool.

Carol

Carol Quirk, Ed.D., Co-Executive Director Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education
7484 Candlewood Rd. Suite R
Hanover, MD 21076
Phone: 410-859-5400 Fax: 410-859-1509 email:cquirk@mcie.org

From: natlac@verizon.net [mailto:natlac@verizon.net] Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2015 8:50 PM
To: Carol Quirk
Subject: Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey

Dear Carol,

Good evening. My name is Natalie Lacatena, and I am a doctoral student at Montclair State University in New Jersey. I am working on my dissertation proposal, and I am specifically interested in the beliefs and instructional practices of general education inclusion teachers. I began my education career as a special education teacher, and the education of special needs students remains near and dear to my heart. I believe all students deserve an equitable education, and I hope my dissertation will provide me with insight into those beliefs and practices that make certain general education teachers more effective than others when working with included students.

While conducting my background research, I came across a dissertation written by Marcia Sprankle in 2009. In her dissertation, Marcia used the Inclusive Education Practices Faculty Survey as one of her data sources. This survey seems ideal for my research purposes, and I am writing to obtain your permission to use this in my own study. At the time Marcia's dissertation was written, the author indicated that the survey instrument has been used in approximately 45 schools, and it was revised once after receiving feedback from 15 school users. If you have any additional information about the instrument's reliability and validity, would you be willing to share that with me, as well?

I thank you for your time and consideration. Please let me know if you would like any additional information about my proposed study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Have a good night.

Natalie Lacatena