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The Limits of Inclusion: Teacher beliefs and Experience with Inclusion of Students with Learning Disabilities

Allegra Johnson

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The Limits of Inclusion: Teacher Attitudes and Experience with Inclusion of Students with
Learning Disabilities

by

Allegra Johnson

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

In partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2020

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Learning Disabilities

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by

Allegra Johnson

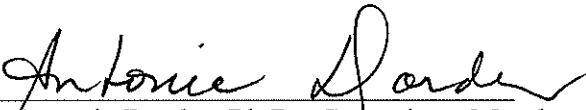
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DEDICATION

To Matilda and my former students at Markham Middle School. Thank you for sharing what you see with me so that I may have a more complete view of the world around us.

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ABSTRACT

The Limits Of inclusion: Teacher Attitudes and Experience
With Inclusion of Students with Learning Disabilities

By

Allegra Johnson

General education teachers are critical contributors to the successful inclusion of students labeled with learning disabilities in general education classrooms. Similarly, teacher beliefs about disability labels significantly influence how teachers include or exclude students labeled with a learning disability in their classrooms. This qualitative study investigated eight secondary general education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their experiences teaching students labeled with a learning disability from a Critical Disabilities Studies perspective. Data were collected using an innovative qualitative method, Q methodology, in order to surface distinct perspectives within the group about inclusion and the experience of teaching students labeled with a learning disability in their classes. The data bore that while teachers agree with the aspirations of inclusive education, they insist they are not capable of teaching students labeled with a learning disability. These findings support the need for systemic change within teacher preparation programs and schools that can disrupt deficit notions of disability.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri (2008) offered that conducting research as cultural work requires that our personal assumptions, values, and biographies are embodied in our work, alongside our identity as scholars and contributors to the literature. I am a mother. I am an educator and I am committed to wellness in all forms. My values for dignity, self-determination, and collective struggle against oppression have uniquely framed my experience as a leader within special education. Collective struggle is important to me as a Black educational leader because I believe that teachers, site administrators, and district administrators need to be aligned in the belief that schools must be places that are adaptable enough to meet the learning needs of all students, and that schools must be revolutionary venues that counteract the structural oppression and sorting of students by race and class that has persisted over time. I believe that the labels we impose upon children in public education not only create a psychological barrier to the development of self-determination within each child, but also invites educators to deflect any responsibility for the under-education of children in their care.

These beliefs were birthed from my experiences during my first teaching position as a self-contained middle school English Language Arts and Social Studies teacher. The students in my class all had an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is a legal document that outlines the individualized and specialized support the student is legally entitled to as a result of being labeled with a disability. Equipped with a scripted reading intervention curriculum and a persistent desire to change my student's lives through the force of my commitment and emerging

teaching skills, I was quickly oriented to a reality that left me feeling both demoralized and galvanized to enact social justice through my work as an educational leader in special education.

My seventh and eighth grade students could not read anywhere near grade level. My seventh and eighth grade students loudly expressed through their words and actions how disconnected and dehumanized they felt in school as a result of being labeled “special ed.” My seventh and eighth graders laughed openly at my insistence that learning to read was the bridge out of the projects and into a middle-class reality. My seventh and eighth graders admonished me for my foolishness in believing that being associated with special education was a good thing and that their IEP could be used as an affirming tool for self-determination. My classroom experience quickly exposed the reality that while special education as an educational institution is robust and pervasive, the people attached to the system are systematically marginalized so as render them invisible, shamed, and made to feel unwelcome. The process of dehumanization that students experience in special education, particularly students of color, is haunting and the extent to which this occurs every day and is accepted within public education is chilling.

My concern about special education was amplified by my experience in my teacher credentialing program. I vividly recall an exchange I had with a professor during my methods course about students who were eligible for special education under the eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability. My professor explained the various processing deficits that a student needs to demonstrate in order to be considered learning disabled. She emphasized our responsibility as special education teachers for advocating for a variety of accommodations for our students. She explained that the purpose of the accommodations was to compensate for the neurological deficit within students that prevent them from learning at the same rate as their non-

disabled peers. I was deeply perplexed by the finality of her message. I was also perplexed by the complicity of my peers in class because none of them seemed uncomfortable by the assertion that students in special education have any inherent inability to learn and there is nothing that teachers can do to alter that reality. I rose my hand and asked “In addition to accommodations, what can we do as teachers to address the deficit? What can we do to help them learn?” My professor flatly responded, “Nothing, if they have a learning disability, there is only so much they can learn.”

My experience teaching middle school and high school students labeled with a learning disability to read and express their understanding in writing has revealed to me that students labeled with a learning disability do not have neurological deficits that prevent them from learning. My experience unearthed that most of my students received poor reading instruction as young children and the disability marker that has been attached to them was actually a marker of poor instruction and educational neglect. My experience as a special education teacher has shown me that standardized traditional methods of teaching do not work for all students, and the logical conclusion when a student is not learning is not that the student has a disability, but that another teaching method or curriculum needs to be considered. In my experience, when teachers and educational leaders use a problem-solving approach when planning instruction, students who were previously categorized as unable to learn are able to make progress and acquire skills that previously eluded them. My experiences as a special education teacher and now as an educational leader have shown me that when the responsibility for student learning is shouldered by the adults in the building and not simply dumped on the students, students labeled with a

learning disability are able to find their footing and learn in a way that is beneficial, affirming, and meaningful.

Statement of the Problem

Special education and general education conceptually and structurally operate as two separate systems within American public schools. The California Task Force on Special Education (2015) published a report linking the disconnect of special education and general education as a central contributing factor to the poor outcomes statewide for students served by special education. The committee noted that because there is little communication between the two systems, too many students are ending up labelled with a disability as a consequence of poor instruction. Nonetheless the field of education overall, has been particularly influential in the construction of deterministic views about the link between academic progress and disability. Linton (1998) argued that within the American educational system, the disability discourse has supported the notion that disability is a phenomenon 1) located within an individual with no association to external conditions; 2) where any deviation from the perceived average signals disability; and 3) that disability is a pathological condition and ultimately a deficit.

In the state of California, during the 2017-18 school year, 774,665 individuals received special education services. Thirty-eight percent of those students received services due to qualifying for special education under the category of a specific learning disability (California Department of Education, 2018). These figures have significant implications for educational leaders for social justice within the state, given the overwhelming number of students the general education setting has been unable to support. Moreover, the processes by which students are labeled as having a learning disability are highly subjective and discriminatory by design.

Two processes govern how a student can be labeled with a learning disability in California schools, either by the discrepancy model or an identified pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Of these two processes, the discrepancy model overwhelmingly has dictated the labeling of learning disability. Hence, a critical examination of the discrepancy model was key to understanding how current conceptualizations of learning disability has obscured the impact of poor instruction and place the responsibility of underachievement in schools at an individual student's feet.

The Discrepancy Model

The discrepancy model has been the most common framework educational professionals use to identify a student as learning disabled. Using standardized measures, a student needs to demonstrate a significant discrepancy between his intellectual ability and academic achievement to be labeled with a learning disability. The discrepancy needs to be linked, through standardized assessment scores, to a processing disorder in the areas of auditory, visual, phonological, sensory motor, attention, association, conceptualization, or expression. Based again on standardized assessment scores, the processing disorder needs to be tied to underachievement in the areas of oral expression, written expression, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, math calculations, basic reading skills, and/or mathematical calculations. To increase the validity of the determination, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, comprised of parents and school staff, is charged with affirming that a learning disability is present, and not the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic conditions.

The lived implication of this process however is that 34% of students in California public schools have been identified as having average intelligence, yet their lack of achievement in school has been viewed through a deficit ideology, which obscures any systematic consideration of how current instructional practices or school designs have failed to meet the needs of 34% of students statewide (California Department of Education, 2018). Given the large numbers of students whose lack of achievement has been attributed to an internal deficit that cannot be remediated by schools, educational leaders for social justice need to position themselves to question this premise and the utility of both our current special education and general education systems-both of which are not serving all kids well.

As noted by Baglieri and Knopf (2004), if we approach the practice of education from the premise that all bodies and minds are naturally unique, then our work as educators must be to shape learning environments that are accessible and meaningful to all. Baglieri, Valle, Connor, and Gallagher (2010) pushed this notion further and argued that imagining education as a practice must be founded on the consideration that perceptions about ability and disability, as well as ideas about mastery and learning are fluid. Further, they argued that consideration must be made for how traditional special education practices mark individuals and limit access to curriculum and environments. This study leveraged the work of these researchers to rescript the narrative about students labeled with learning disabilities and confront persistent teacher perspectives about the experience of teaching students labeled by special education in their classrooms.

Teacher Beliefs

Teacher beliefs about disability labels have influenced how teachers enact schooling as inclusive or exclusive, as well as how students take cues to include and exclude one another (Allan, 1999). The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 2004), the federal law that governs the implementation of special education in the United States, mandates that general education classrooms should always be considered first when discussing placement of students labeled with a disability. While this bias towards inclusion in general education classes is considered progressive, when teacher perceptions of students labeled with disabilities are negative, placement of students in general education may not have a positive impact (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000). Hehir (2003) asserted that when general education teachers view students labeled with a disability as other, teachers may be complicit with, less attentive to, or unaware of how classroom activities and curriculum marginalize and exclude certain students from learning opportunities. In order to achieve meaningful inclusion of all types of learners in U. S. classroom, it has been generally agreed that school personnel who are most responsible for student success, particularly general education teachers, need to be receptive to the principles and demands of inclusion and the inherent flexibility and adaptability that a commitment to inclusion entails (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

Ware (2001) held that critical theorists, pedagogues, and educators need to re-conceptualize disability as a cultural indicator and a meaningful category of oppression. An initial step in deconstructing general education teacher beliefs about disability is engaging the concept that the nature of disability is context specific and disability is defined and negotiated in schools in very specific ways that are reified by both the structures of special education and

general education. For example, the persistent data point that must be addressed by educators is the consistent predictors of identification for special education, which are students identified as male, low socioeconomic status, and non-White (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Locally, in California, data reported for the December 2016 California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS), revealed that 11% of students within California public schools are labeled as having a disability; and of these students 39% are labeled with a specific learning disability, 68% are boys, and 29% are English Language learners (California Department of Education, 2016). Given the social, environmental, cultural, and institutional forces that are strong predictors of identification as a student with a disability, educational leaders need to be prepared to identify and understand the implications of these structures and use this realization to construct meaningful learning environments that are adaptable to all types of learners.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion and their beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability. Given the importance of teacher attitudes for successful inclusion of students labeled with a disability in general education, teacher attitudinal studies regarding inclusion must be a significant component of the research literature (Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum, 2000). This study was relevant because it contributes to a growing body of literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusion and the impact of the ideological construct of disability in American public schools. As noted previously by the California Task Force on Special Education (2015), in order to provide educational equity for students labeled with a disability, general education and special education need to be reconceptualized into a coherent system of education that acknowledges student difference, yet is

prepared to address it within the general education environment. This study aimed to shift consciousness about the role that the concept of disability plays in the practice of schooling and informed the design of teacher preparation programs and professional learning opportunities for educators that dismantle deficit notions of students labeled with a learning disability. General education teachers were the central focus of this study given the pivotal role that general education teachers play in the creation of inclusive learning environments.

Research Question

In order to examine general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion and beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability, this qualitative study utilized Q methodology. Participation was limited to secondary general education teachers who currently have at least one student labeled with a learning disability included in her/his class. The following questions guided this study:

1. What attitudes towards inclusion do secondary general education teachers express?
2. How do general education teachers describe their experience teaching students labeled with a learning disability?

Theoretical Framework

The field of Critical Disability Studies has aimed to examine the meaning, nature, and consequences of disability as a social construct. From this perspective, the process that identifies students with a learning disability within schools is based on medical and clinical conceptualizations of disorder and disability and this labeling process has obscured the failure of educational institutions to be adaptive to all types of learners. This adoption of medical explanations of disability within the field of education has encouraged the assumption that

disability is a condition that exists within an individual and needs to be accommodated by special education. This reasoning is ultimately problematic because it suggests that human difference or diversity is not a natural occurrence, and forces the notion that difference equates to dysfunction, disorder, or deficit (Connor, 2015).

A central idea within Critical Disability Studies is the myth of the normal child (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). Baglieri et al. (2011) cited the influence of eugenics and the drive towards increased efficiency as the root of the conceptualization of a “normal” and therefore desirable citizen. The authors further argued that the state’s goal of a normal population is projected on individuals in all aspects of existence, influencing expectations about how individuals move, think, speak, interact, eat, learn, etc. This reification of the normal body has allowed for the conceptualization of the disabled body and the corresponding social structures needed in order to contain disabled populations.

Similar to other critical traditions, Critical Disability Studies enables one to expose the underlying ideology through which the concept of disability has been constructed. Viewed through a Critical Disability Studies lens, the ideology governing practices within special education are inherently flawed because the historical, social, and political forces influencing the system of education are not acknowledged and the source of the problem is assumed to be the individual student. In place of the current emphasis in education around inclusion of students labeled with disabilities in general education, it is imperative to shift energy away from how to integrate students labeled with disabilities into general education settings and instead, examine and dialogue about how the conceptualization of the normal child is negatively impacting all students and the development of inclusive education (Baglieri et al., 2011).

Critical Disability Studies has maintained that discrimination against and marginalization of people labeled with disabilities is so ordinary that it is invisible. Lalvini (2015) described Critical Disability Studies as a framework that conceptualizes disability as socially constructed, rather than a biological or a universal reality. Additionally, a Critical Disabilities perspective unveils how our collective ideas about normalcy and disability are used as mechanisms to disempower. More specifically, Critical Disability Studies holds that while disability is commonly viewed as an individual's specific deficit, disability should be viewed as a phenomenon that is shaped by physical characteristics of the environment, cultural attitudes, social behaviors, and the institutionalized rules, policies, and practices of public and private organizations (Scotch, 2001). It is important to note that the field of Critical Disability Studies does not represent a unitary perspective and is influenced by disciplines as diverse as sociology, literature, critical theories, economics, law, history, art, and philosophy (Taylor, 2006).

Also, while the framework acknowledges that persons can experience physical, behavioral, or cognitive impairments and these impairments impact individuals in meaningful ways, the social construction model of disability argues that the lived impairment is generally less confining than the discourse of deficit and incompetence that dominates conceptualizations of disability (Abberley, 1987; Allan, 1999; Linton, 1998; Paterson & Hughes, 1999). Using a cultural model of disability, Garland-Thomson (2002) posited that traditional conceptualizations of disability have offered a lens by which to determine cultural values and reactions to the materiality of the body and the social schema that are used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences. Conceptualizations of impairment and disability are closely coupled to one another, and impairment also needs to be viewed as a socially mediated concept since our bodies are felt

in relation to one another. Dominant beliefs about impairment and disability are predicated on the notion that some bodies are flawed and others are not, and those with impairments are disabled, incompetent, and dependent (Goodley, 2016); and therefore, seen as problematic to the profit and accumulative goals of capitalist society (Gleeson, 1999).

Hernández-Saca, Kahn, and Cannon (2018) included that viewing disability labels and disabled identities as co-constructed allows for a deeper understanding of how beliefs about disability are shaped by intersecting systems of privilege and oppression at personal, political, and structural levels, including within education. As noted by Smith, Gallagher, Owens, and Skrtic (2009) given that structures of oppression interlock and overlap, a Critical Disability Studies framework when applied to education can be used to evaluate and influence the ethical impact of practices directed towards both students labeled with a disability and students without such labels.

Within American schooling, disability is largely undertheorized. In the United States, special education is the school-based adjudicator of difference, particularly when other explanations of school failure are deemed culturally unacceptable or threaten to expose the limits of the institution to meaningfully educate all children (McDermott & Varenne, 1998). As noted by Owen, Neville, and Smith (2001), special education has been resistant to negotiate the postmodern critiques of social science, educational practices, and disability studies. The apparatus of special education, configured by IQ tests, segregated classrooms and schools, specialists, psychologists and multiple types of therapists, has conspired to reify human difference into disability categories that mark individuals as abnormal and justify the necessity of the special education system (Baglieri et al., 2011).

Linton (1998) outlined multiple fault lines within commonly held views about disability; for example, disability is an isolated phenomenon internal to individuals, people with disabilities are problems, mainstream explanations about disability are essentialist and deterministic, and people with disabilities are considered inferior to their nondisabled counterparts. The transformative influence of Critical Disability Studies when applied to special education is that the framework shifted the view of special education away from the institutionalized practices meant to address the inherent deficit within each student to an examination of the pervasive inequality perpetuated by the structure of general education, in collusion with special education, and the commonly negative conceptualizations of individuals labeled as disabled within our society (Rice, 2006).

A Critical Disability Studies perspective can also be used to address the instability of how disability markers are applied. For example, eligibility criteria, which outlines what constitutes a disability within special education, varies from state to state, and in some cases within districts. Moreover, many researchers have concerns about these categories because their definitions are vague, and inconsistent across contexts and diagnostic practices (Klinger, Artiles, & Mendez-Barletta, 2006). Furthermore, Fujiura and Rutkowski-Kmitta (2001) asserted that because disability is a fluid concept, it lies victim to methodological bias, the distortion of cultural bias, and the influence of specific contexts.

In relation to how disability is negotiated within schools, the social model of disability, which separates a student's ability to achieve in school from disabling barriers, such as instructional and environmental barriers paired with deficit beliefs, has been important in helping educators understand the kinds of exclusionary pressures that exist and need to be dismantled

within schools. Ware (2001) held that the marker of disability is long overdue for critique and conversation among critical theorists, pedagogues, and educationalists so that disability can be understood expressly as a cultural signifier and a meaningful category of oppression. Drawing from a social constructivist epistemology, Critical Disability Studies is rooted in the acknowledgement of the political, economic, social, and cultural oppression that individuals labeled with disabilities experience and is steadfast regarding the relationship between concepts of normalcy and disability as being co-constructed and guided by those in positions of power and control (Kliewer, 1998).

In order to address the intersection between racism and ableism, the theoretical framework of DisCrit, an iteration of Critical Disability Studies, is grounded on seven key tenets:

1. racism and ableism interact seamlessly, often in neutral or invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy;
2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities and rejects singular notions of identity;
3. race and ability are social constructs, yet carry material and psychological consequences of being labeled as raced or disabled;
4. voices of marginalized communities, traditionally not privileged in research are prioritized;
5. analysis of race and disability must consider the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race;
6. Whiteness is recognized as property and gains for people labeled with dis/ability are largely the result of interest convergence of White, middle class citizens; and

7. DisCrit requires activism and support all forms of resistance. (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2018)

It is important to note the term dis/ability is used intentionally within DisCrit to call attention to the ways in which the common understanding of in education is a student's missing ability to perform culturally defined tasks in schools. The term dis/ability is also used to counter the phenomenon within special education that identifies a student in relation to what he cannot do, and to interrupt the notions of permanency embedded within the concept of disability (Annamma et al., 2018).

By elevating the commonalities between beliefs about race and beliefs about disability, DisCrit further contributes examples of how disability markers have always represented social oppression and been constructed and reconstructed across time to label and justify marginalization of those deemed to be undesirable within a particular context. By making systematic oppression visible, DisCrit scholars reveal how learning ecologies are violent towards some learners and offers a theoretical perspective for disrupting attempts at systematic marginalization (Annamma et al., 2018).

Methodology

Data were collected using the qualitative Q methodology. Q methodology is a method used to assess attitudes of participants by presenting statements and asking participants to sort those statements based upon their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. The benefit of this methodology is that Q methodology neither tests nor imposes meaning and allows participants to identify what is meaningful and what does and does not have value from their individual perspective. While this method is often used to generate survey items, it can also be

used to stimulate detailed interview responses. For the purpose of this study, twenty-three statements addressing inclusion, teacher beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability, and teacher beliefs about their ability to teach students labeled with a learning disability were used during the Q sort process. The statements were written based on the approach used in a similar study conducted by Monje (2017). Following the sort of the statements, participants were engaged in a semi-structured interview to elaborate on their placement of statements and respond to additional follow-up questions. Participants were recruited through the researcher's professional network and represent a convenience sample. Eight high school general education teachers with at least one student labeled with a learning disability in their classroom participated in the study. All of the participants were actively teaching in Los Angeles county at the time of the study.

Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions

A central limitation of this study was the limited amount of time available for data collection. The sample size was intentionally kept small in order to provide enough time for each participant to complete the Q sort and participate in the interview. Data was collected over eight weeks, in order to accommodate the timeline of this project. Given the schedule for completing this investigation follow-up interviews were not conducted and participants were not provided an opportunity to respond to the findings. Future research should consider adding a follow-up component so that participants can react to the perspective their placements of the statements represented.

A delimitation of this study was the exclusive focus on secondary general education teachers, which ignores the various other types of educators who play an impactful role in

schools. Special education teachers, related service providers, and administrators' perspectives and experiences are excluded from this study, as well as the voice of parents and students labeled with a learning disability. Another delimitation of this study was the singular focus on the educational disability category of Specific Learning Disability. There were 13 disability labels that can be assigned to students in special education, and the singular focus on the Specific Learning Disability label created a critical void of analysis of the remaining educational disability categories.

Assuming that special education will continue to be a predominant feature within K-12 public education and students will continue to be labeled with disability through this mechanism, it is imperative that deficit beliefs teachers hold about students labeled with a learning disability be identified, engaged, and deconstructed to minimize the marginalization that comes from being labeled as disabled by special education.

Connection to Leadership and Social Justice

Ponterotto (2005) proposed that the basic goals of social justice research should be to examine and understand the systematic nature of social inequalities that privilege some groups while marginalizing others. Additionally, social justice research should be guided by an intention to push towards a redistribution of power and resources by disrupting and challenging the status quo. In 2015, the most prevalent disability category of students ages 6 through 21 served under the *Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act* (2004) was Specific Learning Disability, and accounted for 38.8% of all students nationally in special education.

A central mandate for general education teachers under the Individual with Disabilities in Education Act is to create the “least restrictive” learning environment for students with IEPs who

are placed in their classrooms. Contrary to this federal mandate, research has shown that many general education teachers hold negative views of students labeled with disabilities and report beliefs ranging for insecurity to hostility about their ability to successfully educate this population of students (Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998). Given the staggering numbers of students labeled with a learning disability being placed in general education classes with teachers harboring deficit beliefs about them, the implication for educational leaders, and more specifically educational leaders for social justice are significant.

With this in mind, the overarching goal of this study was to understand the limiting beliefs and attitudes that general education teachers held about students labeled with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Iris Marion Young (2011), in her book *Responsibility for Justice*, argued that those who act within unjust structures have a responsibility to struggle to make those structures more just. While the assertion that special education in the United States in an unjust structure is controversial or even radical, achievement outcomes for students labeled with disabilities signal a significant problem within special education and general education that needs to be addressed. Following Young's instruction, all educators are implicated in acting to improve the experience and the educational outcomes for students labeled with a learning disability.

Young (2011) further asserted that one of the first tasks of political responsibility is to expose structural injustice by shining a light on the fact that powerful agents have interests in upholding the status quo and that others have a vested interest in fighting for change. The use of Critical Disability Studies as the guiding framework for this study provided an opportunity to exercise political responsibility as an educational leader for social justice. Use of Critical Disability Studies showcased the corrosive influence of racism and ableism within the structure

of special education and how this structure was being used to maintain notions of White supremacy and Eurocentric cultural hegemony. Astutely, Young (2011) advanced that the language of blame impedes discussions that will lead to collective action, which ultimately is needed to rectify social injustice. Additionally, she noted that a public discourse of blame oversimplified the structural injustice and failed to develop a public understanding of the actions and practices that facilitate injustice. As such, this study aimed not to blame general education teachers for their deficit beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability.

Key Terms

Disability: A discursive choice to refer to the traditional conceptualization of disability, attributing disability to deficit in physical or cognitive ability, as it is used within classification structures and organization (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016).

Dis/ability: A discursive choice to highlight the constructed and interdependent nature of both ability and disability. The term is used strategically to counter the narrative that a whole person can be represented primarily by what she or he cannot do. The term also disrupts notions of permanency within the concept of disability and seeks to analyze the entire context in which people function. The slash in the word is intended to disrupt misleading understandings of disability and signify the social construction of both ability and disability (Connor et al., 2016).

Inclusion: Inclusion is the process of increasing participation in and decreasing exclusion from mainstream social settings, such as general education classrooms (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Barton, 2000; Booth, 1996; Kueker, 2000).

Inclusive education: Inclusive education begins with the acknowledgement that human difference is nature and demands that educators expect variation amongst students and support

all students learning without segregation or creating hierarchies of disability (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Stiker, 1997).

Organization of Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 has provided the introduction of the study, included a synopsis of the context for this study, addressed the rationale for the study, and defined the conceptual lens and research methodology of the study.

The literature review featured in Chapter 2 provides an examination of general education teacher beliefs about disability, beliefs about the special education eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD), and teacher beliefs about their ability to teach students labeled with a specific learning disability in their classroom. Additionally, Chapter 2 discusses the various theories of learning disabilities, the intersectionality of racism and ableism. Lastly Chapter 2 highlights the varying definitions and conceptualizations of inclusion and inclusive education.

Chapter 3 discusses Q methodology, the methodology used for the study, and provides a rationale for its use. Use of this methodology provided an example of how educational leaders for social justice can collect data to be used in schools, district, and higher education settings to designing transformative learning opportunities for teachers regarding inclusive education and inclusive practices within classrooms. The data collected through the Q methodology is presented in Chapter 4 in a way that allows for the identification of central themes related to teacher views on inclusion and students with a learning disability in their general education classrooms.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the analysis and interpretation of the data with to the central research questions posited for this study. Recommendations for teachers, educational

leaders, and leadership are provided and topics for further research and limits of this study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

Disabilities, Inclusivity and Teacher Beliefs: Review of the Literature

This chapter examined literature that speaks to the various factors contributing to general education teacher beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability. More specifically, this literature review examined the beliefs of general education teachers about disability, beliefs about the special education eligibility category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD), and teacher beliefs about their ability to teach students labeled with a learning disability in their classroom. Additionally, the review looked at the broadening conceptualization of inclusive education, particularly the prioritization of affirming and adaptive learning environments for all students, as a pivot away from the standard construct of inclusion that narrowly equates inclusion with physical presence in an environment. Lastly, this chapter elaborated on how critical disability studies has created space for dialogue that challenges the current ideology of disability and special education.

Theories of Learning Disabilities

The term “learning disability” emerged in the 1960s, replacing past constructs applied to students who were not learning in school, such as “minimal brain dysfunction,” “brain-injured,” “minimal cerebral dysfunction,” “neurologically impaired,” and “perceptually impaired” (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). According to the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA), 2004, Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain

injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, or intellectual disability, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300. 8)

Despite this legal definition of learning disability, the construct of disability is not one-dimensional. The medical and discrepancy models of disability inform how disability is currently negotiated in schools and the social and interactional models of disability inform the resistance movements focused on exposing disability markers as markers of oppression.

The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability provides the ideological justification of special education in American public schools. The medical model of disability assumes that special needs arise from neurological, physical, or psychological deficit within the student. This conceptualization assumes that children with learning needs are different from typical students and must be prescribed special treatment or a special curriculum from specialists, in order to compensate for the child's difference (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). Educationally, learning disabilities are understood as structural and functional neurological deficits that affect basic psychological and cognitive functioning. A deficit in academic achievement, paired with estimated average intelligence, and a related cognitive weakness are the characteristics that school teams look for to label a student with a learning disability. Research has also shown that learning disabilities are often believed to be caused by genetic and/or developmental malfunctions (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Price & Cole, 2009).

Despite the pervasiveness of the medical model of disability within education, a criticism of the medical model is that it views people labeled with a disability as lacking and unable to participate fully in society. Additionally, adherence to the medical model denies the impact of external factors on a student's learning, such as quality of teaching, the curriculum, or the functionality of the school system (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). Further, Solity (1993) argued this model is based on faulty assumptions, such as all students with IEPs have been provided appropriate learning opportunities prior to identification for special education, that learning opportunities were appropriate to student needs, that effective teaching strategies were always used, and all students enter school with the same level of experience and readiness for the mainstream culture of teaching and learning. These assumptions are troublesome because appropriate evidence to confirm these assumptions are rarely available and rarely challenged.

Within the medical model of disability, a prominent concern is the distinction drawn within Critical Disability Studies between impairment and disability. The literature pointed to challenges educators have distinguishing impairment from disability when discussing "soft disabilities," such as Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Disturbances, and Autism. The conditions are referred to as "soft disabilities" because there are no discernable physical markers of the conditions, which results in an identification process that is inherently subjective (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Speece, 2002; Reschly, 1996). Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) elaborated that perceived learning disabilities, perceived cognitive impairments, and perceived emotional/behavioral disorders are particularly subjective processes, given that tools used to identify these deficits rely primarily on the student's relationship to the context of schooling, and without consideration for the other settings in which the student exists. Yet, despite decades of medical research to locate

physical and/or neurological linkages to these “soft disabilities”, scientific research provides few tools useful to teachers or educational researchers to explain the cause of the majority of conditions determined to be neurological, cognitive, or psycho-social in nature (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017).

The Social Model of Disability

In sharp contrast to the medical model of disability, the social model of disability argues that special education needs arise when inappropriate environmental demands are placed on a student, exceeding his or her current capabilities for meeting demands (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). The social model of disability posits that disabilities are created by society to exclude and marginalized groups of people who fall outside mainstream conceptualizations of what is deemed typical and normal (Oliver, 1996). From this perspective, special education reproduces social inequalities by marginalizing and excluding groups of students who have been deemed as abnormal or atypical learners.

Proponents of the social model of disability also assume that the abilities of students labeled with disabilities reflect the nature and quality of previous learning experiences and that students labeled with disabilities can learn when taught appropriately (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). This viewpoint signifies a key shift in responsibility, placing the onus back on general education teachers to use a variety of techniques and approaches when teaching so that all students are able to learn. Further, Barnes (1996) argued that focusing on environmental demands leads to an analysis of “disabling environments and hostile social attitudes” (p. 15) as a significant barrier to student learning, rather than individual student differences in functioning or capabilities.

There are, however, several criticisms posited against this view of disability. Critics of the social model of disability note that the model does not provide practical guidance to classroom teachers and the model is only useful when analyzing the systems within schools and societal beliefs and values (Clough & Corbett, 2000). Moreover, the model extensively focuses on environmental factors and does not account for how individual student characteristics influence when or why students can or cannot demonstrate learning in school (Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

The Interactional Approach

A third conceptualization of disability has been offered in an attempt to rectify critiques made of both the medical and social models of disability. The interactional approach to disability views each student's level of need as the result of complex interactions between the student's strengths and weaknesses, the level of support available within classrooms, and the appropriateness of the education being provided (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). Similar to a socio-cultural perspective, Keogh, Gallimore, and Weisner (1997) have argued that it is impossible to separate the individual learning capability of a child from the context in which the child lives and functions. The interactional approach is based on concepts drawn from studies on the ways that teacher and student interactions support or impede learning (Skidmore, 1996; Frederickson & Cline, 2002), perspectives on interactionism and interactivity theory (Coles, 1989; Quickie & Winter, 1994), and empirical work that has investigated the influence of the instruction and the learning environment on the process of learning (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015)

The Discrepancy Model

As noted earlier, the discrepancy model is the overarching perspective that determines the labeling of learning disabilities within schools and thus, the disabilities discourse within Special Education. Learning disabilities are generally defined as permanent disorders that affect how individuals with average or above average intellectual or cognitive abilities receive, retain, and express written or spoken information (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). There are various criticisms of the discrepancy model for determining a learning disability. First, the validity of IQ assessments has been called into question repeatedly for all students and, more significantly for Black students. Second, comparing IQ scores to academic achievement scores assumes that these measures statistically correlate to one another, which is a faulty assumption (Kane & Tangdhanakanond, 2008). Further, the range of discrepancy needed to identify a learning disability and eligibility for special education varies from state to state in the absence of an established standard, and the lived implication is that a student can be labeled with a learning disability in one state but not another, rendering the precision and usefulness of a learning disability label debatable, at best.

A global criticism of the discrepancy model is that it assumes that children do or should develop and respond to instruction at the same rate, a presumption easily dispelled by lived experience within a classroom. For example, Dudley-Marling and Dippo (1995) argued the presumption that schools should be “socially efficient” and that all students should process in an assembly line fashion creates a context in which differences are characterized as deficits, in order to preserve the mainstream structure of teaching and schooling as correct, and the individual child as defective and wrong. Tomlinson (2016) argued the construct of disability is a

mechanism to protect the institution of schooling so that systemic changes are not required, despite the significant number of students unable to learn within current teaching configurations.

Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit)

Within the framework of Critical Disability Studies, Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) provides a more nuanced description of disability particularly when paired with the frameworks of Black feminism, Critical Race Theory, and Disability Studies. Emphasizing the importance of intersectionality, DisCrit provides new opportunities for investigating how oppressive patterns of Whiteness and ableism collaborate to target students of color and students perceived to be in the margins of ability (Annamma, Ferri, & Connor, 2018). Significantly influenced by Crenshaw's (1993) framework of interlocking forms of oppression and Hill Collins' (1990) conceptualization of a matrix of domination, DisCrit proposes that people of color also labeled with a disability hold a unique understanding of how power is maintained and exerted in society. Also central to DisCrit's theoretical configuration is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which demarks race, centered in the law, as an organizing principle of power that impacts all aspects of society. CRT implicates racism as the central mechanism by which group advantage and disadvantage is determined, rejects ahistorical accounts of persistent inequities, and advocates for interdisciplinary research that aims to eliminate racial and intersecting forms of oppression (Matsuda, 1993).

DisCrit considers the legal, ideological, and historical aspects both of dis/ability and race and how they work together to deny material access to certain citizens. The root of this denial, as outlined by Annamma, Ferri, and Connor (2018), is belief in the supremacy of Whiteness. A key point to understand is that current practices used to diagnosis and categorize disability are rooted

in the pseudo-science of phrenology, craniology, and eugenics, each of which was intended to validate beliefs about the inherent superiority of Whiteness, particularly when juxtaposed against Blackness (Annamma et al., 2018). DisCrit, therefore offers another view of disability that situates disability within the context of racialized notions of ability, which match racial difference to racial hierarchy. Consequently, dis/ability and race have always been linked, first by pseudo-science, and later validated through supposedly “objective” clinical assessments and practices. Taken all together, the dis/ability-race continuum over time has been reified through laws, policies, and programs so systematically that this construct has become “uncritically conflated and viewed as the natural order of things” (Baynton, 2001).

Impactfully, CRT acutely focuses on re-conceptualizing persistent social, race-based problems (Tate, 1997). For example, Ladson-Billings (2006) reconceptualized the “achievement gap” as an educational debut owed to students of color, implicating the oppressive racializing practices within schools as a counter to the narrative of social or cognitive deficits that student of color bring into classrooms. By narrowing its focus on race within the context of interlocking and oppressive social structures, CRT provides a framework for understanding how racism and White supremacy are enacted in education, while also offering interventions to disrupt these oppressive structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2002).

Pulling both from Black feminism and CRT, DisCrit maintains that special education is an organizing structure that “others” students whose differences are explained according to a deficit view. Moreover, DisCrit acknowledges that disability is a political identity that has been socially constructed from racialized and class-based notions, rather than an objective, medical

condition (Annamma et al., 2018). Representing a small group of scholars within special education scholarship, DisCrit theorists call attention to how dis/ability and race require greater attention in special education research than currently exists, noting that the labeling practices within special education maintain and expand racial segregation among students (Artiles, 2013; Artiles, Dorn, & Bal, 2016; Bal & Trainor, 2016; Erevelles, 2002; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Klinger & Harry, 2006; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Regrettably, outside of this minority of scholars, special education research consistently ignores the racialized nature of education and dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2018).

As noted previously, DisCrit has been crafted around seven central tenets: (1) racism and ableism interact seamlessly, often in neutral or invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy; (2) DisCrit values multidimensional identities and rejects singular notions of identity; (3) race and ability are social constructs, yet carry material and psychological consequences of being labeled as raced or disabled; (4) voices of marginalized communities, traditionally not privileged in research are prioritized; (5) analysis of race and disability must consider the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race; (6) Whiteness is recognized as property and gains for people labeled with dis/abilities are largely the result of interest convergence of White, middle class citizens; and (7) DisCrit requires activism and support all forms of resistance (Annamma et al, 2018). DisCrit provides a space to address structural inequities that are supported by the ideologies of ableism and racism by linking the historical, social, political, and economic interests that limit educational equity to students of color with dis/abilities both on a macro and micro level (Connor, 2015). Much like Whiteness is a social construct, which expands and contracts to include or exclude different people in order to offer or limit social and economic

benefits, concepts of ability and disability have changed over time in similar ways that are deeply impacted by perceptions of race (Banks, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Leonardo, 2004).

DisCrit operationalizes the ways in which binaries of normal and abnormal show up in education, such as in the physical layout of schools that relegate special education to separate hallways or buildings and how university Special Education departments are detached from General Education teacher preparation programs (Young, 2011). In relation to educational research, DisCrit is a valuable tool both theoretically and methodologically to investigate intersectional components of what has been missed or purposefully unacknowledged. DisCrit argues that the non-intersectional approach to educational research provides limited and misleading conclusions that do not serve the persons being studied. As noted by Arzubiaga et al (2008):

Systematic analysis of empirical studies published over substantial periods of time in peer refereed journals in psychology, special education, and school psychology show that researchers have neglected to ask questions, or to document and/or analyze data that would shed light on the role of culture in human development and provide alternative explanations for student achievement and behavior other than student deficits, which are often assumed with minority group status. (p. 311).

Intersection of Racism and Ableism

DisCrit theory in education explores the qualitatively different experiences of students of color with dis/abilities, when compared to White students with dis/abilities by charting the ways in which race, racism, dis/ability, and ableism are built into the interactions, processes, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education (Crenshaw, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso,

2001). DisCrit rejects singular identities such as race, dis/ability, class, gender or sexuality as the primary identity of an individual and, therefore, insists that race and ableism are social constructs. As such, DisCrit recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled raced or dis/abled and being set apart from western cultural norms (Annamma et al, 2018). Within the context of DisCrit, racism and ableism circulate interdependently in invisible ways to uphold racialized notions of normalcy.

Highlighting the need for an intersectional analysis of race and disability, DisCrit scholarship employs a wide range of perspectives and theories in both its theoretical and empirical work. DisCrit scholarship is both interdisciplinary and international, manifesting itself, for example in an exploration of the barriers experienced by Black middle-class families in the United Kingdom in preventing or accessing special education placement (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent, & Ball, 2014), and the ways in which legacies of colonialism and globalism in the global South complicate analysis of race and ableism (Stienstra & Nyerere, 2016). Within the United States, linking CRT and Disability Studies to frame the experience of students of color provides a far more nuanced analysis of their experiences with oppression. For example, Ferri and Connor (2005) analyzed public discourses around the two largest groups of marginalized students—Black students and students labeled with a disability—and using archival research found that special education was used as a tool to maintain racial segregation and racial hierarchies after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision.

Gillborn (2016) illustrated the phenomenon of using disability to limit access to the property rights afforded by Whiteness through his examination of genetic determinism. Using a critical discourse analysis, he offered examples of the implicit scientific racism espoused in

contemporary educational policy in the United Kingdom. Gillborn also noted that race was closely linked in discussions of fixed intelligence, intellectual aptitude, and academic achievement, reified by standardized tests scores, which were cited as the basis of making education policy determinations. Applying a similar reasoning to educational discourse in the United States, the link between the ideology of genetic determinism and special education practices becomes clear. While the connection between race and intelligence is subtle, it is ever present and unnamed, showcasing how easily this discourse can be picked up and disseminated through media without the markers of being overtly racist. Annamma et al. (2018) pointed out that Gillborn's analysis illustrated how race and dis/ability are deeply enmeshed and seep into our collective consciousness quietly and softly, amplifying the need for intersectional frameworks such as DisCrit. Applying Gillborn's analysis to the achievement gap, the persistent emphasis on standardized test scores subtly suggests that the academic performance of students of color and students labeled with a disability is fixed and intrinsic, given the seeming permanence of low achievement scores over time (2018).

Banks (2017) employed a DisCrit framework in his study to better understand the experiences of African American male students who were labeled with learning disabilities. This work is counter-hegemonic in that he provided space for African American male students who were labeled as disabled, to highlight the multiple ways they experienced marginalization along the lines of race, gender, and dis/ability, while also utilizing DisCrit to discuss the complex interplay of racism and ableism in state policies, school practices, and professional and personal beliefs.

Banks (2017) prioritized using the voices of the young men. One participant noted, “These people are never going to stop labeling me” (p. 96), pointing to the effect of feeling perpetually marked as deviant within schools due to his disability label, gender, and race.

Another participant shared:

In my education career [because I was] an African American male and had ADHD, teachers put me in two boxes-disabled and African American. Then with me above six-feet tall, they expected me to be aggressive. [Teachers] have had to check themselves, but after I talk to them about my learning style, they would see me in a whole different light. (p. 105)

The phenomenon of overrepresentation of students of color, particularly Black and Latino students, in the more subjective educational disability categories such as Specific Learning Disability and Emotional Disturbance is evidence that the process of racialization is at work (Harry & Klingner, 2014). The underrepresentation of Asian American students, who are homogenized as the “model minority” and the exclusion of Native American students in almost all research on students with disabilities provides further evidence of the influence of racialized practices within special education (Annamma et al., 2018).

Inclusivity and Education

Concerns tied to inclusion are central to understanding general education teacher perceptions of students labeled with a disability. As such, engaging the literature on inclusion and inclusive education was useful to this study.

Inclusion

In relation to special education, the most literal definition of inclusion characterized inclusion as the physical placement of students labeled with disabilities in general education classrooms. Interestingly, inclusion is not defined federally in the *IDEA* (2004). The statute refers instead to the “least restrictive environment.” More specifically, least restrictive environment is defined as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, [be] educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment [occur] only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (20. U. S. C. 1412(5)(B))

Yet, despite the absence of the term “inclusion” in the federal legislation, full inclusion of students labeled with disabilities is perhaps the most widely and fiercely debated contemporary issues related to special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Foreman (2005) defined inclusion as a philosophical commitment schools need to uphold based on educating all of the students within its community, regardless of the level of ability or disability. Tomko (1999) defined inclusion as an action- students labeled with disability participate in general education classrooms with full membership, while engaging in curriculum that is aligned to the goals in each student’s IEP. Salend (2008) took a broader view and outlined four principles for effective inclusion: 1) equal access of all learners to general education; 2)

individual differences need to be accepted, appreciated and accommodated; (3) all teachers must engage reflective practices and differentiate instruction at all stages; and 4) community and collaboration amongst staff is essential to providing quality programs and services to all students.

Taking a slightly different perspective, Rynkal, Jackson, and Billingsley (2000) identified three central themes about inclusion that were present in professional definitions of the practice: placement of students labeled with disabilities in naturally occurring settings, grouping all students regardless of ability together during instruction, and use of supports and modifications to meet all student learning needs. Additional aspects of the complexity of defining inclusion are rooted in the contradictory educational values that promote inclusion while also continuing to perpetuate viewing difference from a deficit perspective (Lunt & Norwich, 1999). Many advocates of inclusion, however, insist that full participation and high standards for all students are not mutually exclusive goals and both can be achieved through inclusive education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1996).

Vlachou (1997) noted the conceptual ambiguity of inclusion is pervasive, both in academic literature and amongst educators. Dyson (1997), while acknowledging the multitude of definitions of inclusion, distinguished two intersecting domains along which the various discourses about inclusion can be sorted. The first domain is oriented around a rationale for inclusion that considered the rights of students and the ethics of teachers, while the second domain prioritized the efficiency of inclusion for school systems (Moberg, 2003). The rights and ethics discourse of inclusion comes from sociological criticisms of special education and asserts that full inclusion of all students labeled with disabilities is the only way to enact social justice in education. As a counter to the rights and ethics domain, the efficiency discourse of inclusion

asserts that inclusive education is more effective and cost efficient than segregated classrooms or schools. Contemporary advocates for inclusion in schools tend to fall within one of the two domains.

Inclusive Education

A more nuanced discussion about inclusion occurs in scholarship regarding inclusive education. Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) advocated for three overarching goals of inclusive education that are aligned with social justice and critical pedagogy. The first goal asserted that inclusive education is not preoccupied with improving special education, but with improving educational outcomes for all students by valuing all students for the unique ways of knowing they bring into a general education classroom. The second goal insisted that inclusive education embraces each student as a being whose identities, needs, and competencies are unique, while linked to shared histories and memberships that need to be recognized and validated within the classroom. Lastly, inclusive education supports pedagogies and instructional practices that affirm all teachers and learners as capable of learning when they are able to thoughtfully and purposefully participate in the world around them.

In the United States, inclusion is typically characterized as initiatives to increase access to general education for students labeled with disabilities. Other definitions of inclusion, however, are broad and varied, yet in its simplest form, inclusion is the process of increasing participation in and decreasing exclusion from mainstream social settings (Armstrong et al., 2000; Booth, 1996; Kueker, 2000). From a Critical Disability Studies perspective, the ideological construct behind standard definitions of inclusion reify taken for granted assumptions that the natural position of students labeled with disabilities as a group is one of “dis-belonging” (Baglieri et al.,

2011). As such, a newly conceived notion of inclusive education emerged from a general dissatisfaction with traditional conceptualizations of special education and inclusion, as well as dissatisfaction with how research and teaching in special education has been conducted, and how research findings pathologize and further marginalize people labeled with disabilities (Florian, 2005; Landorf & Nevin, 2007).

Inclusive education is aspirational and not a final state to be reached. It is a process that should be developed and enhanced, and considers the needs and differences of all children. Visser, Cole, and Daniels (2003) added that in order for schools to be effective in meeting the needs of all children, schools need to be open, positive, and diverse communities, as opposed to selective, exclusive, and rejecting environments. Beyond referring to students labeled with disabilities, inclusive education is about all students and an acknowledgement that all learners have complex, and multiple identities and needs (Hall, Collins, Benjamin, Nind, & Sheehy, 2004). Inclusive education is not about placement, but is centrally about each student's experience of learning and their quality of life in school (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015).

From the newly framed standpoint of inclusive education, people labeled with disabilities should experience the same rights, opportunities, and options as other members of society stemming from a belief that inclusion will result in stronger social and academic achievement, advanced citizenship, and stronger communities (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). Inclusive education, as framed by Baglieri et al (2011), positions inclusive education within an international context, given that American educational literature overwhelmingly represents inclusion singularly as the act of physical placement of students labeled with disabilities in general education.

Ballard (1999) noted that some researchers view inclusive education as an evolutionary progression of special education, while others, Ballard included, situate inclusive education as an alternative to special education “knowledge and practices,” and defines inclusive education as increased access to general education instruction and classroom participation. Ballard contended that inclusive education means that general education educators strive to identify and remove all barriers to learning for all students. Moreover, educators must broaden the scope of inclusive education beyond the integration of students labeled with disabilities and include students experiencing poverty, racialized students, and students expressing non-conforming sexuality, or other characteristics that did not reflect the dominant culture in their society.

A critical first step towards inclusive education is the development of productive dispositions for educating and supporting diverse groups of students in schools (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). At its core, inclusive education accepts that human difference is normal (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Stiker, 1997). The perspective of difference as normal requires that variations among students are expected and that teachers are able to support the learning of all students without segregating or creating a hierarchy of abilities. A concrete example of this perspective is the *Beyond Access model*, which is an instructional planning framework that includes a comprehensive evaluation of the student and their interactions within a variety of school structures that may facilitate or impede inclusivity (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010). According to this model, inclusivity is characterized as an ongoing interaction between an individual and the environment, and intervention within the environment is essential to the success of each student.

Acknowledging the influence of teacher preparation programs in developing teacher

dispositions, the Elementary Inclusive Education Preservice Program at Teachers College, Columbia University (2018) released a position statement on inclusive education and teacher preparation and asserted that inclusive education is a practice that seeks to resist and redress the various ways in which students experience marginalization in classrooms. Inclusive education, according to the position statement, is about all students, and more specifically, about the cultural practices of schooling that create an environment in which all students are supported and affirmed.

Baglieri et al. (2011) pointed to the increasingly strong international frameworks for inclusive education which transgress the boundaries and limitations of American special education ideology. Slee (2001) elevated a fundamental challenge surrounding the concept of introducing inclusive education within the context of special education without first critically analyzing the ways that discussions of inclusive education are narrowed by the current contingencies of special education epistemology. Slee also advocated for a departure from definitions of inclusion that only reference students labeled with disabilities, to a definition of inclusive education that is aspirational and directly towards the goals of democratic education and addresses the experience of all students in all schools.

Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005) has provided a useful definition for inclusion:

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. . . it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision

which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (p. 13)

Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cacello and Spagna (2004) recognized that inclusive learning environments require all staff members within a school system to work together voluntarily to support the unique learning needs of all students. An ongoing commitment to evaluation and change are also significant components of successful inclusive environments. Finally, Burstein et al. asserted that successful inclusion requires deep structural and curricular change and this change will occur incrementally. Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) elaborated stating that efforts to enact inclusive education requires a committed investigation of the histories and beliefs about ability and disability that have systematically resulted in the exclusion of individuals labeled with disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017).

Teacher Beliefs about Inclusion and Disability

In general, studies of teacher attitudes about including students labeled with disabilities in general education classrooms are inconclusive and at times contradictory. Scholars have surmised that teacher beliefs are directly related to their ability to effectively teach students (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Ross & Gray, 2006; Whitley, 2010) and that teacher beliefs influence classroom practices and instructional decision making (Munby, 1982; Nesper, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Given these conditions, it is necessary for educational research to continue to investigate what teachers believe and the factors that influence teacher beliefs.

Studies have revealed that teachers are more receptive to including students labeled with disabilities, regardless of eligibility category, as long as the student's presence does not require additional responsibilities or action on the part of the general education teacher (Center & Ward,

1987; Houck & Rogers, 1994). The literature represented that high school teachers as a group tend to have more negative attitudes toward inclusion, given the particular pressures teachers experience as secondary educators (Van Reusen, Soho, & Barker, 2001). Van Reusen, Soho, and Barker (2001) reported that high school teachers believe their responsibility for preparing students to meet graduation requirements and cultivate the necessary academic, social, and technical skills for college and the workforce is an impediment to providing differentiated instruction in their classrooms.

As noted by Pajares (1992), humans are hardwired to create meaning, pulling from the context of their internal and external experiences, and individual beliefs represent elements of a knowledge structure. The formation of beliefs is thought to ultimately influence behavior (Bandura, 1986; Hofer, 2001; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Within the context of education, understanding this process is key so the link between beliefs and teacher practices can be better understood. A commonly accepted aspect about beliefs is that collective beliefs can form without explicit group consensus, and in the absence of reflection beliefs are less likely to change (Lasley, 1980). Studies on beliefs point to the tenacity of beliefs, even in the presence of conflicting evidence (Clark, 1997; Nisbett & Ross, 1980, Pajares, 1992) and researchers have speculated that changes in beliefs result from significant paradigm shifts. Unexpectedly, other research has suggested that while beliefs are difficult to alter, individuals' perceptions of facts can be influenced by the available information.

Scholarship on teacher beliefs is imperative because teacher beliefs consistently influence teacher expectations, behaviors, and decisions, all of which directly impact student learning. Rath (2001) interrogated the impact that teacher preparation programs can have on shaping

teacher beliefs about various student groups because many individual enters a teacher preparation program believing they have the necessary qualities required for successful teaching. Consequently, the traditional model of teacher preparation has not been effective in altering the preexisting beliefs of pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, Raths (2001) argued teacher preparation programs are indeed a well-suited context for shaping positive teacher beliefs about students.

In a study of 71 preservice general and special education teachers, Silverman (2007) found that participants who reported high level epistemological beliefs were significantly more likely to hold more positive attitudes toward inclusion. The study drew upon previous research that identified three major factors that contributed to positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion: general education teachers believed that students labeled with disabilities can learn and achieve at the best of their abilities (Bishop & Jones, 2003; Weiner, 2003); teachers maintained a strong sense of self-efficacy for teaching students labeled with disabilities in inclusive settings (Brownell & Pajares, 1999); and general education and special education teachers viewed one another as partners in supporting students labeled with disabilities (Glatthorn, 1990).

Silverman (2007) noted a particular urgency for developing high level epistemological beliefs and positive attitudes regarding inclusion during inservice training given the increased amounts of time students labeled with disabilities are spending with general education teachers. Silverman also astutely referred to the imperative of preservice training program to address preservice teachers' negative attitudes towards students labeled with disabilities because without intervention to shift these beliefs, preservice teachers may never learn how to relate to students labeled with disabilities or develop the belief that all students do not have the same learning needs.

Studies (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Van Reusen, Soho, & Barker, 2001) have also yielded findings which show that general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion are correlated with the number of courses that focus on teaching students labeled with disabilities. Both studies supported the conclusion that the more courses general education teachers take focused on supporting students with disabilities, the more likely they are to report positive attitudes towards inclusion. Pernell, McIntyre, and Bader (2001) additionally found that general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion progressed positively following completion of a course about working with students labeled with disabilities. Another factor impacting teacher beliefs about inclusion presented in the literature is years of teaching experience (Hastings & Oakford, 2003).

The influence of teacher beliefs was also examined by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), during which a randomly selected group of students were identified to teachers as most likely to experience “dramatic” academic growth in their class. The researchers found that teachers had higher expectations for the students who were identified to learn the most, and the students identified to learn the most obtained greater IQ score gains than students who were not identified as likely to learn.

Educational researchers offered varied perspectives on teacher beliefs and inclusion. Proponents of inclusive education (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010; Monsen & Frederickson, 2003) argued that teachers generally hold positive views towards the concept of inclusion. However, other researchers have consistently found that while teachers generally hold positive views about the concept of inclusion, they simultaneously report not feeling equipped to teach students labeled with disabilities in their classroom and tend

towards a more negative view around the implementation of inclusive education (Andrews & Frankel, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Kalyva, Gojkovic, & Tsakris, 2007; Slavica, 2010).

Discussing inclusion from a general education teacher perspective, Andrews and Frankel (2010) found major teacher concerns around the implementation of inclusive education were inadequate training, lack of skills for teaching students labeled with disabilities, lack of appropriate infrastructure of inclusion, and the absence of appropriately adapted curriculum (2010). Consistent factors identified as barriers to inclusion include lack of administrative support (Fuchs, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Kalyva et. al, 2007; Slavica, 2010), lack of resources (Gaad & Khan, 2007; Kalyva et al., 2007) and inadequate teacher preparation and training (Ali, Mustapha, & Jelas, 2006; Bigham, 2010; Dupoux, Hammond, Ingalls, & Wolman, 2006; Fuchs, 2010; Slavica, 2010).

Fuchs (2010) evaluated the stance of general education teachers in a small qualitative study of elementary school teachers and found that while most participants agreed that inclusion was a positive educational placement for students labeled with disabilities and that all students benefit from learning in an inclusive environment, participants did not ultimately favor the practice because they felt unprepared to meet the educational demands or responsibilities of inclusion. Allen (2003) noted that barriers to inclusion extend beyond schools and include ways of knowing (about special education); ways of learning (to be a teacher); and ways of working (within accountability systems). Allen further acknowledged that while these are pervasive and far reaching barriers, identification of their destructive potential is key.

Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) conducted a study focusing on the types of accommodations and modifications general education teachers reported providing to students

labeled with a disability who were included in their classes. The authors found that the teachers reported using strategies such as adaptations to tests and assignments, cooperative learning groups, and alternative teaching strategies least often, despite these being frequently endorsed strategies to use with students labeled with disabilities. Bender, Vail, and Scott (1995) yielded similar findings, highlighting a problematic circumstance in which general education teachers are not using differentiated strategies that are widely purported to be beneficial for various types of learners.

Soodak, Podell, and Lehman (1998) conducted a study with 188 general education teachers and surveyed them to determine their attitudes towards including student with disabilities in their classrooms. Two dimensions surfaced through their analysis of the data: hostility/receptivity and anxiety/calmness. Results from the study indicated that teacher attitudes and beliefs, student characteristics, and school climate were related to both dimensions. The results yielded three key conclusions. First, higher teacher efficacy was associated with stronger receptivity to inclusion. Second, inclusion of students labeled with physical disabilities over students labeled with cognitive or behavioral disorders was associated with higher receptivity to inclusion. And third, higher receptivity was associated with use of differentiated teaching practices and teacher collaboration. Other interesting findings were that hostility towards inclusion with this sample increased as years of teaching accumulated and low anxiety was reported regarding inclusion of students labeled with learning disabilities where there was higher teacher efficacy and small class sizes (Soodak et al., 1998). Soodak et al. astutely concluded that results from the study demonstrated the complex nature of teacher beliefs and attitudes about inclusion.

Students labeled with a learning disability remain the largest category of students in special education nationally (U. S. Department of Education, 2018) and increasingly students labeled with a learning disability are spending the majority of their instructional time at school in a general education classroom (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Teacher beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability encompass beliefs about students, teaching, learning, instruction, the role of education, and the nature and effect of disabilities, and definitions of success and achievement in classrooms (Landers, 2017).

Research in the field has yielded interesting, but inconsistent results about the beliefs teachers hold about students labeled with a learning disability. For example, studies have shown that teachers believe that students with special needs will demonstrate poor performance in general education classes (Clark, 1997; Whitley, 2010), yet teachers have more positive views of students labeled with a learning disability when their performance is average or above average (Meltzer, Katzir-Cohen, Miller, & Roditi, 2001; Meltzer et al. 2004; Meltzer, Roditi, Houser, & Perlman, 1998).

Further, according to Cortiella and Horowitz (2014), four out of 10 teachers reported they believed that learning disabilities were caused by a student's home environment, and 81% of teachers surveyed believed learning disabilities were equal to an intellectual disability. Tracking back to the seventies and eighties, researchers have linked socioeconomic status to teacher expectations and found that teachers often interact differently with students of lower socioeconomic status than themselves (Clark & Peterson, 1984; Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Rist, 1970), which can offer some insight into the phenomenon of disproportionality of students of color and students from low socioeconomic communities within special education. Furthermore,

in a study conducted by Zigmond, Levin, and Laurie (1985) found that over sixty percent of the general education teachers surveyed reported that having students labeled with a learning disability included in their class increased additional demands on their teaching. Teachers reported the students required more attention, more extensive lesson planning, more time collaborating with special education staff, and more adjustments to their grading practices.

Chapter Summary

Research on teacher beliefs about inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability is imperative given the direct links between teacher beliefs and teacher action and problem solving. This literature review examined the various factors that contribute to general education teacher beliefs about inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability. This discussion examined the expansion of the concept of inclusivity in education, and the ways in which racism and ableism intersect to marginalize and other certain groups of students. The next chapter will discuss the methodology and research design of this study for the purpose of adding to the existing body of literature on general education teacher beliefs about inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Given the importance of teacher attitudes in facilitating the successful inclusion of students with disabilities, teacher attitudinal studies regarding inclusion must be a significant component of the research literature (Cook et al., 2000). This study aimed to contribute to a growing body of literature regarding general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion, as well as general education teacher's perspectives of students labeled with a learning disability. Goals for this study included shifting consciousness around the role the concept of disability plays on the actions and attitudes of general education secondary teachers, and informing the design of teacher preparation programs and professional learning opportunities for educators that disrupt deficit notions of students labeled with a learning disability.

This chapter provided a rationale for the use of an innovative qualitative method, Q methodology, to examine general education teachers' attitudes about inclusion and their experiences with students labeled with a learning disability. Using Q methodology, this research sought to identify key attitudes, perspectives, and experiences of secondary general education teachers that need to be engaged both within teacher preparation and professional development programs, in order to create holistically inclusive learning environments that are responsive to all types of learners.

Research Questions

Scholars have surmised that teacher beliefs are directly related to their ability to effectively teach students (Lynn et al., 2010; Ross & Gray, 2006; Whitley, 2010), and that

teacher beliefs influence classroom practices and instructional decision making (Munby, 1982; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Given these conditions, it is necessary for educational research to continue to investigate what teachers believe and the factors that influence teacher beliefs. As stated earlier, two central questions drove this investigation:

1. What attitudes towards inclusion do secondary general education teachers express?
2. How do general education teachers describe their experience teaching students labeled with a learning disability?

Methodology

Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” A major strength of a qualitative approach is that qualitative methods are an effective tool for simplifying and managing data without sacrificing context and complexity. Additionally, qualitative methods generate new ways of understanding existing data. (Atieno, 2009). Fassinger and Morrow (2013) outlined that social justice research exists on a continuum ranging from inquiries that build knowledge and raise awareness to scholarship that engages both researcher and participants in social action projects with the explicit objective of changing oppressive structures and systems. Taken that a goal of this study was to shift consciousness of the role the concept of disability plays on the actions and attitudes of general education secondary teachers, a qualitative methodology, specifically Q methodology, was an appropriate approach for this study.

Description of Q Methodology

Q methodology is a method for studying participant perceptions and attitudes of a topic or idea (Stephenson, 1935). More commonly used methods for collecting data on perceptions

and attitudes are Likert Scales and Semantic Differential Scales. Likert Scales include a set of statements participants are asked to rate according to their level of agreement with the statement, and on a Semantic Differential Scale, participants are asked to numerically rate statements along a set of bipolar adjective scales. Both methods require large sample sizes and significantly limit interaction between the researcher and participants (Cross, 2005; Manstead & Semin, 2001). While both Likert scale and Semantic Differential scale are economical methods for gathering large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time, these methods do not readily provide an explanation for why respondent rated statements the way they did, which is a disadvantage in relation to the goals of this investigation.

One advantage of Q methodology is that a small sample size can yield reliable results and sample sizes can range from eight and thirty respondents (Webler, Danielson & Tuler, 2009). Since the interest of Q methodology is segments of perspectives within a sample and the extent to which they are similar or dissimilar, the number of participants holds less value within this methodology (Brown, 1993). Additionally, Q methodology has been shown to be a reliable procedure for studying subjective attitudes and topics. Unlike narrative analysis, which focuses on the story told by each individual about a topic, Q methodology focuses on a range of viewpoints that are shared by a specific group of participants, which is an important unit of analysis when attempting to understand the attitudes and beliefs of a defined group (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Linking this choice of methodology to the goals of social justice research, Q methodology is a tool that supports serving the needs of the community in which the research is conducted because it surfaces shared meaning within a group.

A strength of the methodology is that Q methodology neither tests, nor imposes meaning

a priori on participants. Instead, the Q sort requires participants to identify what is meaningful and what does and what does not have value and significance from their perspective (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Q methodology is primarily an exploratory technique. It cannot prove hypotheses; however, it can bring a sense of coherence to research questions that have many, potentially complex and socially contested answers (Stainton Rogers, 1995). Lastly, this study was situated on the continuum of qualitative social justice research and the use of Q methodology is a valuable approach for creating dialogue within the school community about beliefs related to inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability. The qualitative aspect of this study will elevate the awareness of participants through the telling of their stories and beliefs as a catalyst for self-reflection and change. Flick (2014) advised researchers to revisit her research questions when selecting the appropriate methodology and research design in order to ensure alignment. Table 1 summarizes four reasons for using Q methodology and contextualizes each reason according to the information it will yield in response to this study's research questions.

First developed by William Stephenson in 1935, Q methodology was derived from factor analytic theory in order to provide a systematic method for examining human subjectivity (Brown, 1993, 1996). Defining subjectivity for the purposes of Q methodology, McKeown and Thomas (1988) characterized subjectivity plainly as a person's communication of her or his point designed in such a way as to preserve the idiosyncratic expression of each participant so that it cannot be confused or compromised by the researcher. As a result, this method has been

Table 1

Reasons for Using Q Methodology and Its Relevance to this Study

<u>Reasons (Brown, 1993)</u>	<u>Relevance to research questions</u>
Q methodology is able to provide insight into the underlying philosophical or ideological structures that uphold subjective phenomenon.	Teacher beliefs and perceptions about disability and inclusion are complex, nuanced, and multifaceted
Q methodology has been used to investigate deconstruction, social construction, feminism, identity theory, and narrative and discourse analysis.	Interdisciplinary nature of Critical Disability Studies requires a contemporary methodology for investigating subjectivity.
The factors are qualitative categories of thought and represent distinct ways of thinking within a group.	General education teachers as a group play a significant role in inclusion and awareness of distinct perspectives within this group are vital when attempting inclusive education.

Note: Adapted from “A Primer on Q Methodology,” by S.R. Brown, 1993, *Operant Subjectivity*, 16, 91–138. Copyright 1993 by International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity.

used to collect and analysis perspectives of respondents in a number of fields, including medicine (e.g., Barbosa, Willoughby, Rosenberg & Mrtek, 1998), education (e. g., Militello & Janson, 2007), law (e. g., Marshall, 1991), business (e. g., Lee & Synn, 2001), and journalism (e. g., Singer, 1999).

More specifically, Q methodology involves providing a set of statements about a particular subject matter to participants to be ranked or scaled in order to create a forced distribution of attitudes (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Q methodology is essentially a gestalt procedure (Good, 2000). Each participant ranks the statements according to her own levels of agreement or disagreement, hence creating a visual display of the value she assigns to each statement (see Appendix A). Burt & Stephenson (1939) referred to each ranking as the “psychological significance” placed on the statement. While the statements are predetermined, Q sorts are able to measure subjectivity because each participant is sorting the statements according to her own or his own point of view.

The Participants

The participants (see Table 2) in this study were eight general education high school teachers who at the time of the study had at least one student labeled with learning disabilities included in their class. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Recruitment emails were sent to teachers within the researcher's professional network and participants for this study were the first eight teachers to volunteer to participate.

The participants included two male Social Studies teachers, two female math teachers, two female English teachers, and two female Science teachers. The years of teaching experience across the participants ranged from four to 22 years, and the number of students labeled with a learning disability taught in their classes ranged from 31-200 students, approximately. The participants had experience in a variety of educational settings, including traditional public schools and charter schools. Some teachers had the unique experience of teaching in both a traditional high school and a charter high school. Racially, the majority of the participants identified as White, and 38% of the participants identified as Latino, Asian, or African American.

Table 2
Demographics of Participants Relevant to this Study

<u>Participant Pseudonym</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Number of Years Teaching</u>	<u>Estimated Number of SLWLD Taught</u>
Duke	Social Studies	6	71-80
Anna	Math	7	31-40
Becky	English	6	81-90
Harper	Science	4	61-80
Joanna	Math	13	140-150
Bonnie	Science	6	51-60
Dawn	English	11	191-200
Oliver	Social Studies	22	141-150

Data Collection

Participants sorted the statements (see Table 3) using a forced distribution. Cross (2005) emphasized the advantage of a forced sort because it requires respondents to consider their placement of beliefs and values carefully and removes the possibility that respondents will agree with more statements than disagree. A blank Q table was provided to each participant and each participant was instructed to divide the statements into two categories: agree and disagree.

Table 3:

Statements Used in Q sort

<p>General attitudes towards inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- I believe the inclusion of students with a learning disability might hinder the learning of non-special education students.- I believe in the principles of inclusion but I am concerned that I do not always know how to support students with learning disabilities appropriately.- I have a strong desire to create an inclusive learning environment for all students.- I have found that many of the things I do for students with a learning disability are also beneficial for general education students.- I believe that some accommodations or modifications for students with learning disabilities are unfair to non-disabled students.- Students with learning disabilities disrupt the learning of their non-disabled peers.- Students with learning disabilities improve the general education learning environment.- All students should be educated together in general education classes.
<p>General education teacher's experience teaching students labeled with LD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- I am apprehensive about my ability to teach students with a learning disability.- I feel qualified to teach students with a learning disability.- I feel successful in teaching students with a learning disability.- I need more help in my classroom when students with learning disabilities are included.- I don't know how to make accommodations and modifications for students with learning disabilities.- Teaching students with learning disabilities makes me a better teacher.- I change the way I teach when I have students with learning disabilities in my class.- I feel overwhelmed by teaching students with learning disabilities.
<p>General attitudes about students labeled with LD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- I am concerned that some students with learning disabilities will never be able to complete grade-level work.- Students with learning disabilities lack the motivation to be successful in general education classes.- Some students with learning disabilities need too many accommodations to the curriculum and that threatens the academic integrity of the content.- I don't understand why students with learning disabilities are included in general education.- Teaching students with a learning disability is the same as teaching general education students.- Students with learning disabilities want to succeed just as much as general education students.- Students with learning disabilities are able to achieve academically as much as general education students- I believe that students with learning disabilities are able to learn.

From the two piles, participants were asked to select the two statements she disagreed and agreed with the most. The statements were placed on the outermost columns of the grid and

the remaining statements were placed in the grid based on the participants' level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. These statements were placed on the grid and the statements used for the sort for this study were adapted from Monje (2017). The statements represent both positive and negative attitudes and beliefs general education teachers have expressed in the literature about the inclusion of a student with disabilities in their classrooms.

Each participant completed their Q sort independent of one another and immediately following each Q sort was a semi-structured interview. The interview questions (see Table 4) were also adopted from Monje (2017), in order to increase the reliability of the study. As noted by Alshenqeeti (2014), a benefit of interviews is that they are interactive and allow for interviewers to probe for complete responses, as well as any emerging themes. The goal of interviewing is to broaden the scope of understanding of the phenomenon being investigated, while still engaging each participant in a naturalistic manner.

Table 4:
Interview Questions Each Participant Answered

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why did you choose the two statements you most agree with in the Q sort? Can you recall an experience that helped inform these choices?2. Why did you choose the two statements you most disagree with in the Q sort? Can you recall an experience that helped inform these choices?3. What are your feelings or experiences with students with learning disabilities in your classroom?4. Why types of support do you receive for students with learning disabilities in your classroom? If none, what type of support would you like to receive?5. Do you feel qualified to teach students with learning disabilities in your classroom? Why?6. How do students with learning disabilities help or hinder the learning process for all students?7. Do you believe that students with learning disabilities are successful in your classroom?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. What makes them successful?b. What hinders their success?8. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to add or talk about regarding inclusion or your experiences with students with learning disabilities.
--

Semi-structured interviews, in particular, provide the option of depth in responses, while also providing the interviewee structure and parameters around the type of data collected. The structured aspect of semi-structured interviews ensures that all relevant areas related to the interview question are addressed while allowing flexibility for the interviewee to seek clarification or elaboration on related comments or thoughts shared by the participants (Berg, 2007). The Q sort served to provide focus to the interview and each interview opened with the participants elaborating on the two statements she or he placed in the strongly agree and strongly disagree columns.

Analytical Plan

It is important to note within Q methodology that each factor is a qualitative category of thought and while numbers are involved in determining the groups around a factor, the labeling and description of the factor is mediated by the researcher's engagement with the data. Analysis for this study focused specifically on the distinguishing statements within each factor and the consensus statements across all participants. A distinguishing statement was determined by its similar placement on the grid by participants within a distinct factor. Consensus statements were determined by similar placement of a statement across all participants.

The interview data were initially coded using predetermined codes derived from the literature cited in Chapter 2. The predetermined codes applied were (1) inclusion is about physical placement, (2) othering of students labeled with a learning disability, (3) responsible for all students, and (4) deficit perspective towards disability. Codes used for the next cycle of coding included (1) barriers and strategies to implementing inclusion, (2) feelings and experiences teaching students labeled with learning disabilities, (3) supports teachers need with

facilitating inclusion, (4) teachers’ beliefs about being qualified to teach students labeled with learning disabilities, and (5) students labeled with learning disabilities help or hinder the learning process. Based on the themes that emerged from the data, the next cycle of coding included the following codes: (a) I can’t teach students labeled with a learning disability alone, (b) inclusion as an aspiration, (c) frustrated by the experience of teaching students labeled with learning disabilities, and (d) students labeled with learning disabilities experience trauma in general education classes. The final round of analysis engaged the following codes: principles of inclusion, feasibility of inclusion, and general education/special education collaboration.

Cycle 1	Cycle 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion as a physical placement • Othering • Responsible for all students • Deficit perspective towards inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Barriers and strategies to inclusion ▪ Teacher feelings and experience ▪ Supports needed ▪ Belief about qualification ▪ Help or hinder the learning process
Cycle 3	Cycle 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not alone ○ Inclusion as an aspiration ○ Frustrated by the experience ○ Students experience trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Principles of inclusion ✓ Feasibility of inclusion ✓ General education/special education collaboration

Figure 1. Summary of analytical plan.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were that engaging participants in the Q methodology was time consuming and a small sample size was engaged to accommodate the dissertation timeline.

Given the nature of this qualitative study, causality of general education teacher’s beliefs could

not be determined and the analysis of the data collected is not generalizable to a larger population.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the exclusive focus on secondary general education teachers. The design choice ignored the various other levels of educators who play an impactful role in schools, such as special education teachers, related service providers, and administrators. Additionally, the voices of parents and students labeled with a learning disability were excluded from this study. A further delimitation was the exclusive focus on the educational disability category of Specific Learning Disability. There are 13 disability labels that could be assigned to students in special education and excluding the other disability categories from this study limited the equally important analysis of the other labels. Lastly, the use of the Q sort methodology, in place of survey data, was a delimitation, given the prevalence of past studies on teacher attitudes towards inclusion are based on survey data. I assert, however, that Q methodology is uniquely designed to capture the spectrum of attitudes about a phenomenon more effectively than survey data collection.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion and their beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability. This study aimed to shift educator's consciousness around disability labels and how disability labels influence the ways in which general education teachers include and exclude students labeled with a learning disability in their classes. Further, this study showcased a relevant research methodology, Q methodology, that educational leaders can use to inform the design of teacher preparation programs and professional learning opportunities that will confront deficit notions that pervade educational discourse about students labeled with a learning disability.

In order to examine general education teacher attitudes towards inclusion and their beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability, the qualitative method, Q methodology, was employed. Taken together, the interview and Q sort data highlight consistent shared perspectives across the participants. While the general education teachers espoused their belief in the principle of inclusion, the teachers expressed that they cannot teach in an inclusive classroom without support from another adult. Teachers held persistent concerns about the feasibility for inclusion of students labeled with learning disabilities given their perception of their skill level and the total number of students in their classes.

Q sort Findings

The Q sort data was analyzed using the Ken-Q Analysis, a web application specifically designed for analyzing Q data (<https://shawnbanasick.github.io/ken-q-analysis/>). Each individual Q sort was input into the application and a factor analysis for seven distinct factors was

performed. Each factor returned represents a distinct point of view related to the inclusion of students labeled with a learning disability. Table 5 lists the factor each teacher's Q sort loaded onto. The numerical values that drive the construction of each factor are the factors scores, which are calculated by taking an average from all of the Q sorts associated with that factor (Brown, 1993). Two of the seven factors analyzed for this study returned an Eigenvalue greater than one, which indicates two distinct perspectives that were found in the sorts (Donner, 2001). The two factors have been labeled Partial Inclusion and Collective Deficit. As the researcher, I chose the title for each factor based on the distinguishing statements. This component of the data analysis highlights the qualitative aspects of the methodology given that as the researcher I am the tool used for data interpretation. The mathematics involved in the factor analysis process is not a critical component taken into consideration when interpreting Q sort data. The labeling and interpretation of each factor is of greater importance than the numerical values yielded during analysis, specifically because the function of Q methodology is to identify the meaning and measure of subjectivity within individuals and within groups (Brown, 1993).

Factor 1: Partial Inclusion

There were two teachers, Harper and Joanna, whose Q sorts placed them into Factor 1, which has been labeled Partial Inclusion. This perspective was defined by the two distinguishing statements: "I somewhat disagree that all students should be educated together in the general education classes" and "I somewhat disagree that I feel overwhelmed teaching students with learning disabilities." The group has been labeled as Partial Inclusion due to the incongruent attitude of not feeling overwhelmed by students with a learning disability in their classes, and yet believing that all students should not be educated in general education.

Table 5
Participant Demographics and Factor Groups

Teacher Pseudonym	Subject	Number of Years Teaching	Estimated Number of SLWLD taught	Factor Descriptor
Duke	Social Studies	6	71-80	Personal Deficits
Anna	Math	7	31-40	Personal Deficits
Becky	English	6	81-90	Personal Deficits
Harper	Science	4	61-80	Partial Inclusion
Joanna	Math	13	140-150	Partial Inclusion
Bonnie	Science	6	51-60	Personal Deficits
Dawn	English	11	191-200	Personal Deficits
Oliver	Social Studies	22	141-150	Personal Deficits

Factor 2: Personal Deficits

The remaining six teachers were placed in Factor 2, which had been labeled Personal Deficits. The four distinguishing statements within the group were: “I somewhat disagree that students with learning disabilities are able to achieve academically as much as general education students,” “I strongly disagree that I feel confident teaching students with learning disabilities in my classroom,” “I disagree that I feel successful teaching students with a learning disability,” and “I somewhat disagree that I feel qualified to teach students with a learning disability. ” This group was labeled as Personal Deficits due to the deficit-based lens the teachers applied to their teaching abilities and their deficit belief that a student labeled with a learning disability is unable to achieve as much as their non-labeled peers.

Shared Perspective

Of particular interest, considering the goals of this study, were the shared perspectives across all of the participants. The consensus statements that represented a shared perspective

across all of the teachers were: “ I strongly disagree that students with learning disabilities lack motivation to be successful in general education classes,” “I disagree that some accommodations or modifications for students with learning disabilities are unfair to non-disabled students,” “I somewhat disagree that teaching students with a learning disability is the same as teaching general education students,” “I somewhat disagree that the inclusion of students with a learning disability might hinder the learning of non-special education students,” “I somewhat agree students with learning disabilities improve the general education learning environment,” “I agree that students with learning disabilities want to succeed just as much as general education students,” “I agree with the principles of inclusion but I am concerned that I do not always know how to support students with learning disabilities appropriately,” “I strongly agree that I have found that many of the things I do for students with a learning disability are also beneficial for general education students. ”

The shared perspective was labeled Competing Beliefs and represented the most significant component of the Q data collected. This perspective was labeled Competing Beliefs because general education teachers emphasized their belief in the principles of inclusion, however insisted on their inability to teach in an inclusive environment. Table 6 provides a succinct summary of each perspective.

Table 6
Summary of Q sort Perspectives

<p><u>Factor 1 Perspective: Partial Inclusion</u> We are not overwhelmed teaching students with a learning disability and all students should not be educated together in general education classes.</p>	<p><u>Factor 2 Perspective: Collective Deficit</u> We are not confident teaching students with learning disabilities in our classroom. We do not feel qualified or successful teaching students with a learning disability and we believe that students with learning disabilities are not able to achieve as much as their general education peers.</p>
<p><u>Shared Perspective: Competing Beliefs</u> We believe in the principles of inclusion but we are concerned that we do not always know how to support students with learning disabilities appropriately. We do not believe that teaching students with a learning disability is the same as teaching general education students. We disagree that the inclusion of students with a learning disability might hinder the learning of non-special education students and we disagree that some accommodations or modifications for students with learning disabilities are unfair to non-disabled students. We believe students with learning disabilities can improve the general education learning environment and we have experienced that many of the things we do for students with a learning disability are also beneficial for general education students. We strongly disagree that students with learning disabilities lack motivation to be successful in general education classes and we agree that students with learning disabilities want to succeed just as much as general education students.</p>	

Interview Findings

A key finding from the interview data was while most teachers offered an aspirational vision for inclusion, each teacher interviewed highlighted various points of frustration they attributed to having students labeled with learning disabilities included in their class. Specific points of frustration included not believing they were qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability and their large class sizes. Another key finding was that teachers had a specific vision of how they wanted to interact with special education teachers when they have students labeled with a learning disability in their classes.

Six of the eight teachers offered an aspirational description of inclusion and their goals for an inclusive classroom. Teachers cited socialization, autonomy, and student empowerment as critical components on inclusive education and inclusive classrooms.

Duke described an inclusive classroom as a reflection of society and characterized it as a space for modeling inclusive civic participation:

This is learning, team building, learning how to socialize with different folks from different backgrounds and different folks with different abilities. So, I really think the classroom is a place to kind of learn how to be a person in society. And so, I feel that having an inclusive environment with diversity of different types of students is important. And I think it teaches students even more within what they actually learned in the classroom when it comes to content. And so also, as a society, I believe that we should be an inclusive society. And folks with special needs, if they're always being quarantined, they're not going to be able to live successfully in society. But if we challenge them, and put them in challenging environments, with all sorts of other students, you'll be surprised how much the students learn from one another. So, I feel having infrastructure for inclusion are very important.

Joanna offered that inclusive classrooms should serve the function of acculturating students to all types of learners given that all types of individuals are represented in society as a whole:

There's no, like, when you go into the real world, the real world is not special ed and regular students, that's not how it is. So, for our students, regardless of what group quote end quote you put them in, like, when the real world come, everybody has to work together. And if you can't do that, at this level, like if we're not teaching our kids on both ends, and you're not teaching our students with disabilities to start speaking up and talking about the issues, you know, the problems and struggles they are having, and we

are not teaching the regular students to deal with students who need that extra help, then we have an even bigger problem I think in the real world.

Bonnie shared a more localized goal of inclusion which included student autonomy and empowerment:

But I think inclusion doesn't just mean being in the gen ed population, I think it means access to education, access to empowerment and autonomy. And that's definitely something I personally and I think our school should strive for.

Despite the earnest descriptions of the benefits and their personal goals for inclusion, all eight teachers expressed that they felt frustrated by the experience of having students labeled with a learning disability in their classes. Harper localized her frustration around the limited number of students labeled with a learning disability she believed she could teach effectively, "So every year I have about eightish students. I feel like I see progress with and I directly make a difference with maybe like half of them. I feel proud of my progress with half of them." She later explicitly used the term frustrated during her interview when she described her perception of a student labeled with a learning disability giving up in class,

I think some of them, kind of like, give up before they try. *So* maybe I didn't set up enough opportunities for them to see that they can be successful in my class. And then like, giving up before they try can sometimes lead to behavior issues and then that's when I get more frustrated.

Becky highlighted that she felt frustrated with the expectation that she should have to lead an inclusive classroom on her own, and that feeling unable to support a student's need in her classroom resulted in her feeling inadequate as a teacher. Becky commented that she felt fearful

when “inclusion just means let’s put every child into the gen ed class and then not give any support for teachers, like no push-in, no aide, like nothing.” Becky expressed feeling frustrated “when I see a student who has a significant need, and I feel like I am very unequipped to meet that need, or I see that they need more resources, and I can’t provide that to them in the moment.”

She elaborated sharing

It’s really hard when you’re like, I’ve put so much effort, I’ve explained it this way, this way, this way. And like, I don’t know what I’m doing wrong, and like why they’re not understanding this.

Multiple teachers disclosed they did not believe they were qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability. Joanna was the most explicit about linking her uneasiness with inclusion to her training,

I don’t know that I am necessarily as qualified as I should be to do full inclusion. But I do agree that it should be done. But I’m not, I know that I am not fully comfortable with with it. Not because I don’t like it, but because I am not trained.

Interestingly, Duke was emphatic that he felt qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability, but also that he was not able to successfully teach students labeled with a learning disability without support from a special education teacher. He shared,

I think I am qualified, but just like I said before, knowledge is one thing, but then just in practice, trying to do it. As the school year progresses and gets faster and faster and faster with like, all the things that happen, sometimes I get to a point where you’re like, how am I going to help this kid? You know, sometimes I’m even like implementing a lesson and asking myself How do I make this content accessible to the student?

He also expressed later during his interview,

I just don't have the capacity to do that. Yeah, with every single thing that we're reading. Yeah. And so that's when you kind of feel defeated a little bit because then you start seeing students struggle even more because they just not understand what going on.

Bonnie offered a similar perspective, stating that she felt qualified, but unable to teach students labeled with a learning disability alone,

In general, I think I am qualified, but not on my own. Not without support, or without people to ask questions to. And I definitely don't think that my classes should be like a one stop shop for all students. A specific example would be students who have learning disabilities that manifest physically. Or students that need constant someone to be next to them at all times. Whether it's for attention or for physical manifestations, or for I guess behavioral things. Those have been a little bit more challenging for sure.

Class size was mentioned by four teachers as a significant source of frustration when students labeled with a learning disability were included in their classes. Duke commented, Sometimes when you have a class of 36 kids, it's hard to implement. And so that is where the challenge is. But in regards to like understanding what you need to do, understanding how to provide those extra supports, with extra resources and extra visuals and using different strategies to teach, I feel like I know them. It's just when it comes to implementation on the everyday, it's kind of like when you play sports, you are always practicing how to do certain things, but then when you're in the game it's different. Being able to implement that consistently, that's where the challenge comes.

Anna offered,

Can I be doing more? And that's hard. It's just hard. Because like being in the classroom, by yourself, you have to meet every kid's needs. And so, when you have almost 35 kids in a classroom, how does one person meet 35 needs in one hour, 45 minutes sometimes. That is really hard to navigate as an educator.

Harper explicitly noted the challenge of providing individualized support when teaching a class with 35 or more students.

I have some resources that have worked really well with some students with learning disabilities. But time is usually a constraint and with like, 35 other students to challenge and make sure they're learning at an appropriate pace that is challenging are difficult to balance. I think honestly, I go through like, some weeks I'll like create like five new resources for reviewing basic content and then other weeks will go by and I'll be like, "Oh, these students are probably like way behind."

Two teachers shared very specific and similar visions of how they would like to work with a special education teacher when a student labeled with a learning disability was included in their class. Bonnie shared,

One thing I do wish that, you know, someone could do with the time permitted would be to sit in my classroom, push in. I think --teacher's name---used to do that the first couple of years that I worked here, and it was nice to have another adult watch what was happening, to see if that was typical behavior or typical engagement for students. Because it's hard to tell if it's what I am doing, or what we're doing in the classroom, the day, or the peers the students are with. So, I think another pair of eyes would be nice.

Duke recounted a past relationship he had with a special education teacher he believed supported students and improved his practice,

Out of all of the special education teachers I have worked with she was the only one that like, would come into my classroom and like, genuinely, sit down and try to figure out what's going on in my classroom. And she was like in tune with what was going on in my classroom and all the classrooms. And that was a great model. Just that kind of collaboration, and then just that ability to practice seeing, how does it look like when I accommodate an assessment for a student? What are the things that go on? And like small group testing, how do I best support my student before getting to the assessment? I feel like the collaboration that I had that first year really helped improve my craft in the classroom, just because I understood how it looked like how these accommodations look in practice.

Two teachers spoke explicitly about failure, one in reference to the students and the other in reference to herself. About students, Duke shared,

And you keep on seeing failure and failure and failure and you don't feel supported. And then after a while, it's hard to keep on trying to move forward. And I've seen that with certain students, even this last year, where I had certain students where it's like, yeah, you never feel successful. And it's hard for you to keep on pushing forward. I mean, even myself, if I didn't get to taste any success, and I just kept on trying and no matter what I try I am wasn't able to succeed, and I didn't have any support around me to really lift me up, I would give up too.

He added, “Just the history of constantly facing failure. That’s a big barrier almost like it’s a trauma that just enveloped their whole being and they just don’t feel like they can be successful.”

Dawn closed her interview reflecting on her experience with failure when she had students labeled with a learning disability in her classroom: “I think I would like to close with the fact that when you’re seeing us fail, which happens all the time, you have to know it’s not intentional.”

In closing, the teachers who participated in this study shared aspirational beliefs about inclusion, yet were emphatic about their concerns over the feasibility of leading an inclusive classroom. Teachers consistently highlighted their beliefs about their inability to teach students labeled with a learning disability, particularly without the support of a special education teacher. These findings stand in contrast with the narrative that including students labeled with a learning disability is the solution to attaining educational equity and this contrast will form the basis for the discussion of the data in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2004), the federal law that governs the implementation of special education in the United States, mandates that general education classrooms should always be considered first when discussing placement of students with IEPs. This mandate functionally, has created a strong bias towards the inclusion of students labeled with a learning disability in general education classes. According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2011), upwards to 96% of students with disabilities spend at least part of their day in a general education classroom. Nonetheless, research continues to bear that most general education teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach students labeled with a disability and do not believe they should be held accountable for those students' academic success (MetLife, 2010; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Yates & Ortiz, 2004).

In order to enact inclusive education, the various challenges of contemporary schooling need to be interrogated, such as the socio-cultural, institutional, bureaucratic, and interpersonal ways in which students labeled with a disability experience exclusion in school (Baglieri et al, 2011). While the general education teachers who participated in this study shared aspirational beliefs about inclusion, the teachers were emphatic about their concerns over the feasibility of leading an inclusive classroom. The teachers consistently highlighted their beliefs about their inability to teach students labeled with a learning disability, particularly without the support of a special education teacher. These findings stand in contrast with the narrative that including students labeled with a learning disability is the solution to attaining educational equity.

These findings also align, however, with previous research on general education teachers'

beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability and continue to elevate questions and concerns about the benefits of inclusion when general education teachers as a group believe they are unable to successfully teach students labeled with a learning disability in their classrooms. Furthermore, inclusion in general education can be disabling to students labeled with a learning disability when general education teachers do not believe they can effectively teach students labeled with a learning disability, when general education teachers do not engage in reflective practices, and when teachers do not address the contradictions regarding their beliefs as an educator and their beliefs and actions regarding students labeled with a learning disability. Lastly when general education teachers view students labeled with a learning disability as inferior to students who do not carry a disability label the experience of inclusion is detrimental to students who carry a disability label.

Discussion of Findings

A consistent trend across participants was a positive and aspirational conceptualization of inclusion, coupled with an insistence that they did not feel qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability in their classrooms. The incongruency of these beliefs exposes a significant limit of inclusion when the teachers most responsible for its success feel most ill-equipped. As noted by both Duke and Joanna in their descriptions of inclusion, one of their goals for an inclusive classroom is to build the foundation for an inclusive society. Both teachers reasoned that when diverse learners are able to learn and build community with one another in an inclusive classroom, students will carry the experience into their adult civic life, which will be accepting of sharing space with individuals labeled with a disability.

Despite stated aspirations, the teacher's beliefs that they are not qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability creates a critical tension that situate general education classrooms as disabling environments for certain types of learners. This finding is consistent with past studies that while teachers generally hold positive views about the concept of inclusion, they simultaneously report not feeling equipped to teach students labeled with disabilities in their classroom and tend towards a more negative view around the implementation of inclusive education (Andrews & Frankel, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Kalyva et al., 2007; Slavica, 2010;). Joana was the most explicit about linking her lack of comfortability with inclusion with her training,

I don't know that I am necessarily as qualified as I should be to do full inclusion. But I do agree that it should be done. But I'm not, I know that I am not fully comfortable with with it. Not because I don't like it, but because I am not trained.

Functionally, the teachers described inclusion as the student's ability to access to the general education curriculum. Salend (2008) took a broader view and outlined four principles for effective inclusion: equal access of all learners to general education, individual differences need to be accepted, appreciated and accommodated, all teachers must engage reflective practices and differentiate instruction at all stages, and community and collaboration amongst staff is essential to providing quality programs and services to all students. Of particular note about the teacher's conceptualization of inclusion, the teachers did not discuss any reflective practices they engaged in to best support students labeled with a learning disability in their classrooms. A conclusion to be drawn from this omission is that teachers do not see themselves as learners within the context of inclusive education and subsequently exercise little agency to better understand how to

effectively teach students labeled with a learning disability.

Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) advocated that inclusive education should not be preoccupied with improving special education, but with improving educational outcomes for all students by valuing all students for the unique ways of knowing they bring into a general education classroom; and that inclusive education should support pedagogies and instructional practices that affirm all teachers and learners as capable of learning when they are able to thoughtfully and purposefully participate in the world around them.

Unfortunately, the general education teachers who participated in this study offered few examples of the use of differentiation strategies to make their curriculum more accessible for the broadest number of students. Duke commented,

Sometimes when you have a class of 36 kids, it's hard to implement. And so that is where the challenge is. But in regards to like understanding what you need to do, understanding how to provide those extra supports, with extra resources and extra visuals and using different strategies to teach, I feel like I know them. It's just when it comes to implementation on the everyday, it's kind of like when you play sports, you are always practicing how to do certain things, but then when you're in the game it's different. Being able to implement that consistently, that's where the challenge comes.

Harper noted,

I have some resources that have worked really well with some students with learning disabilities. But time is usually a constraint and with like, 35 other students to challenge and make sure they're learning at an appropriate pace that is challenging are difficult to balance. I think honestly, I go through like, some weeks I'll like create like five new

resources for reviewing basic content and then other weeks will go by and I'll be like, oh, these students are probably like way behind.

When probed, many of the teachers shared that embedding accommodations or differentiated supports were an afterthought when planning and implementing their lessons.

It has been posited that inclusive education is not singularly about placement or access to curriculum, but is centrally about each student's experience of learning and their quality of life in school (Elshabrawy & Hassanein, 2015). Several of the teachers were able to identify the poor quality of life that students labeled with a learning disability experience in general education settings. This acknowledgement, however, was not pair with a discussion of actions the teacher took to improve this condition, and their acknowledgement without subsequent action is another example of ways in which general education teachers are not engaging in reflective practice.

Teacher beliefs about disability labels influence how teachers enact schooling as inclusive or exclusive, as well as how students take cues to include and exclude one another (Allan, 1999). Teacher beliefs about students labeled with a learning disability encompasses beliefs about students, teaching, learning, instruction, the role of education, and the nature and effect of disabilities, and definitions of success and achievement in classrooms (Landers, 2017). Teachers consistently referred to minimal or no success with gaining an understanding of grade-level curriculum as a significant marker of a student labeled with a learning disability. The barrier they attributed to the student's limited success was attributed either to something internal within the child.

The reflection Duke offered when describing his placement of statements during the Q sort points to the association of students labeled with a learning disability with consistent failure

and is reflective of the deficit narrative of students labeled with disabilities that pervades within education. While Duke, unlike many of the other participants, shared that he believed his teacher preparation program taught him strategies to use with diverse learners, he like others was persistent about his inability to differentiate his teaching, specifically due to his class sizes, which each participant in this study also mentioned. Duke expressed,

And you keep on seeing failure and failure and failure and you don't feel supported.

And then after a while, it's hard to keep on trying to move forward. And I've seen that with certain students, even this last year, where it's like, yeah, you never feel successful.

You never feel successful and it's hard for you to keep pushing on.

Critical disability studies hold that while disability is commonly viewed as an individual's specific deficit, disability should be viewed as a phenomenon that is shaped by physical characteristics of the environment, cultural attitudes, social behaviors, and the institutionalized rules, policies, and practices of public and private organizations (Scotch, 2001). Duke's observation about students labeled with a learning disability consistently being faced with failure touches upon the phenomenon of the size and structure of general education classes being a contributing factor to the failure that students labeled with a learning disability experience. An interesting note about Duke's responses during the Q sort and interview reveal that he recognizes the impact of the general education environments on the negative experiences that students labeled with a learning disability face. However, as noted previously, he like the other teachers did not speak to the ways in which he attempted to mitigate these barriers for students labeled with a learning disability. Additionally, Duke offered,

[The statement] I don't know how to accommodate or how to make accommodations and

modifications for students with a learning disability, I strongly disagree with that because that was kind of focused on when you go to school to learn how to teach, that's a big focus. And I strongly disagree with that because I know those strategies. The only thing, what's really difficult is the implementation. And so I feel like we all know how to do it. But it's hard to implement. Sometimes when you have a class of 36 kids, it's hard to implement.

During her Q sort, Joanna strongly disagreed with the statement "All students should be educated together in general education classes." She explained.

But going with both motivation and self-efficacy, and there's like a balance of being in general education classes and being with all your peers, and feeling included. And on the other end, being in that class and feeling excluded, because you are in that class and feeling uncertain, not seen or not understood. And so I think it always comes to what's best for the student's learning and what's best for the student's future.

One important point that she makes that deserved further analysis is the declaration that students labeled with a learning disability and students who do not carry a disability label are not peers. This speaks to the "othering" of individuals labeled with disabilities and further contributes to the very narrow sense of responsibility that most of the teachers expressed in regards to students labeled with a learning disability. Furthermore, her response validates the shared opinion of many general education teachers that all students are not capable of learning in a general education classroom and general education teachers should not be held responsible for teaching all types of learners

Becky also spoke directly about her observations of students labeled with a learning

disability, when elaborating on her placement of statements during the Q sort. She strongly disagreed with the statement that students with a learning disability lack motivation to be successful in general education classes. She shared,

I don't think that there's any correlation between your ability status and your motivation to be successful. I think sometimes it can appear that kids with a learning disability lack motivation, because they're so like, overwhelmed, or they're so lost, or they're not able to, like, access the curriculum in a way and so they kind of just shut down as a defense mechanism. But I don't think that's a lack of motivation. I think that's coming from like, a very, like human response to being really overwhelmed and lost and feeling a lot of negative emotions and trying to survive.

Becky poignantly speaks to the disabling and potentially hostile environment that general education classes can represent for students labeled with a learning disability, and missing from her recognition of this condition is any mention of her responsibility to create a more supportive and welcoming environment for students who struggle academically. While she expressed creating a supportive environment for all students in her definition of inclusion, she did not speak to any concrete steps or strategies she uses to actualized her vision for inclusion. She like the other teachers, however, were able to speak abundantly about the challenges of meaningfully supporting all students in an inclusive environment. As noted by Barnes (1996), focusing on the environmental demands of a general education classroom, rather than focusing on individual student's achievement leads to an analysis of "disabling environments and hostile social attitudes" (p. 15) as a barrier to student learning, rather than individual student differences in functioning or abilities. Such an analysis was consistently missing from the responses offered by

the teachers who participated in this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for educational leaders to address general education teachers' concerns about inclusion of students labeled with a learning disability in general education include developing a consultative model of special education at each school site, reduced general education class sizes, and facilitate professional learning opportunities that address deficit thinking and its impact on teaching and learning. Various studies have highlighted the influential role principals play in facilitating inclusive education (Cherian & Daniel, 2008; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Pugach, Blanton, Correa, McLeskey, & Langley, 2009). Teachers in this study consistently emphasized the need for more support from special education teachers in various forms: planning, embedding accommodations in assignments and assessments, peer observation, and peer coaching, and principals are uniquely situated and the most empowered to set the expectation for the type of professional collaboration.

Silverman (2007) found that teachers who reported high level epistemological beliefs were significantly more likely to hold more positive attitudes toward inclusion. The study drew upon previous research that identified three major factors that contributed to positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion: the belief the students labeled with disabilities can learn and achieve at the best of their abilities (Bishop & Jones, 2003; Weiner, 2003); teachers maintaining a strong sense of self-efficacy for teaching students labeled with disabilities in inclusive settings (Brownell & Pajares, 1999); and general education and special education teachers viewing one another as partners in supporting students labeled with disabilities (Glatthorn, 1990).

As such, the professional culture within schools needs to prioritize collaboration and collective efficacy and principals need to lead their schools with the intention of developing such a culture. In order to lead this work, critical skills that a school leader for social justice needs to develop are fostering a shared vision of inclusion, creating collaborative structures, facilitating teacher centered professional development, using and leading teams to use data based decision making, and understanding how to facilitate continuous improvements (Furney, Aiken, Hasazi, & Clark/Keefe, 2005). In order to lead for systemic change, principals need to proactively construct their schools' ideology around inclusion, which should include the beliefs that all children can learn, all children need to feel they belong, and all teachers are responsible for teaching all students. Steps principals can take to create an inclusive ideology are exposing teachers to new ideas, modeling and leading reflections on teacher actions, and leading with a commitment to change (Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997).

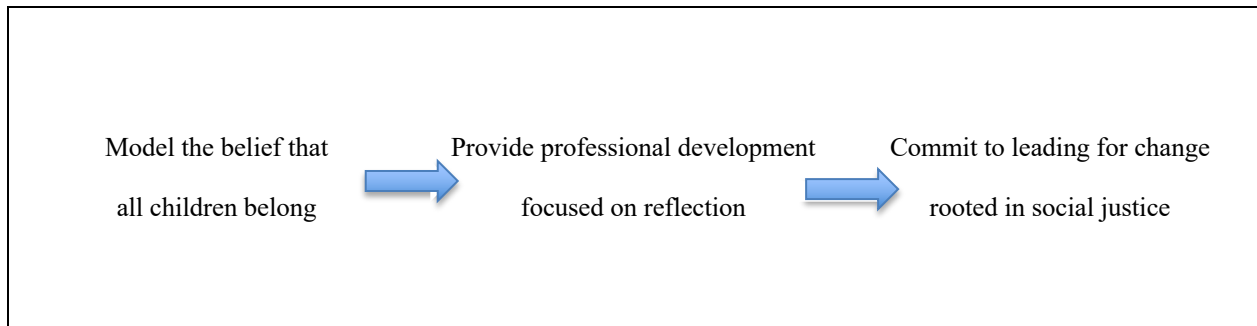


Figure 2. The role of the principal in facilitating inclusive education.

Using disproportionality as an indicator, schools and districts need to seek to understand why and how organizational patterns and structures shape disparities across students so that those dimensions of individual schools and across a district can be identified and corrected, or identified and dismantled (Sullivan, Artiles, & Hernandez-Saca, 2015). As defined by Thompson (1994), systemic change is a framework for holistic change within an organization that results in

a comprehensive realignment of perspectives, policies, and practices within an educational system. Critical elements regarding systemic change within schools and districts includes inquiry about equity, participation and responsibility, collaboration between professionals, policies and resource allocation, and pedagogy (Sullivan et al., 2015). Valuable questions to guide this inquiry are listed in Table 7. It is important to emphasize that the inquiry process to drive systemic change is inherently context specific and individual schools within a district will identify different elements of their unique structure that need to change (Sullivan et al., 2015). Additionally, Allman (2007) advocated for systemic reform aimed at critical revolutionary praxis in the place of reform efforts that focus singularly on the improvement of teacher’s technical skills.

Table 7
Systemic Change Guiding Questions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What disparities exist? - What factors within our control are contributing to these disparities? - What does equity mean to us as a school community? - Where do we see examples of equity? - What is learning? - What is the purpose of schooling? - What is our responsibility as educators? - Do we have the same responsibility for all kids? - What is our responsibility to one another as educators and colleagues?
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Implications

In order to engage in the reflective practices needed to achieve meaningful inclusion of all students within classrooms, educators need to adopt the social model of disability, which separates a student’s impairment from the disabling barriers erected within classrooms, schools, teacher and student beliefs, and attitudes of institutions. Hehir (2003) asserted that when general education teachers view students labeled with a disability as other, teachers may be complicit

with, less attentive to, or unaware of how classroom activities and curriculum marginalize and exclude certain students from learning opportunities. This shift in consciousness requires that educational researchers turn their focus away from how to integrate students labeled with disabilities into general education classrooms. Significant attention needs to be directed toward how to dismantle the ideology of the normal child and how to facilitate the belief within general education teachers that all students can learn and teachers are equipped and empowered to teach all types of learners.

In order to facilitate this shift, teacher preparation programs need to undergo systemic reform that is aimed at creating the teacher beliefs and attitudes needed for the successful inclusion of students labeled with a disability in general education. A framework for systemic reform, grounded in the conceptual framework offered by Voltz, Collins, Patterson, and Sims (2007) can aid in the development of teacher preparation programs for inclusive education. The critical components of a teacher preparation program for inclusive education are that teachers cultivate a socio-cultural awareness that acknowledges the need for equity, teachers hold affirmative attitudes connected to equity, teachers are able to engage in solutions oriented collaborative skills that can use with other teachers, students, parents and other professionals, and how to utilize critical pedagogy with their classroom.

As noted by various scholars, teacher preparation reform must be a central priority for improving the learning and quality of life of students labeled with disabilities (Blanchett & Wynne, 2007; Sorrells, Webb-Johnson, & Townsend, 2004; Zion, Blanchett, & Sobel, 2014). Zion, Blanchett, and Sobel (2014) offered an example of the types of reform needed in teacher education through their contributions to a school-university partnership model that provides

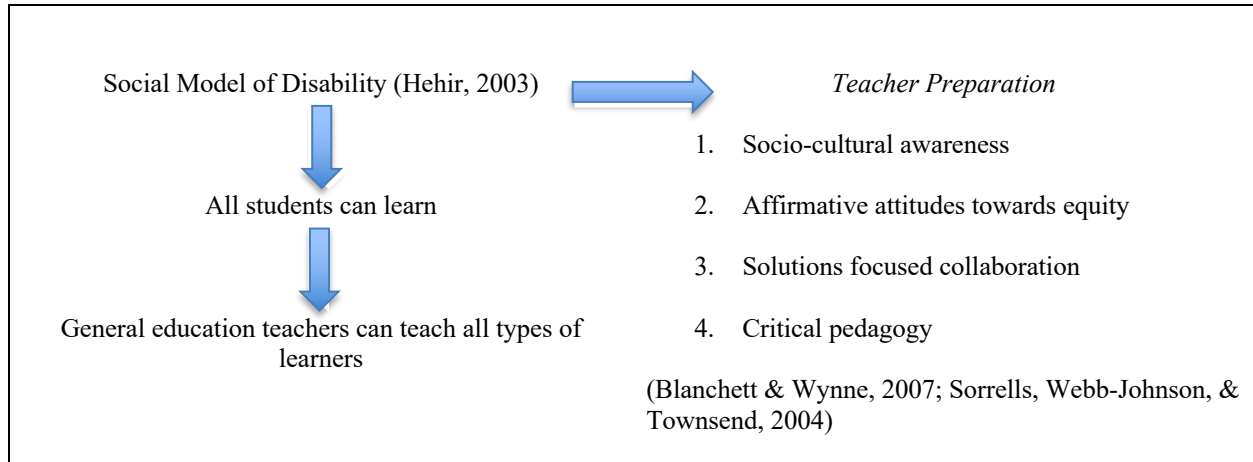
teacher candidates with the opportunity to engage in collaborative learning experiences and reflective practices alongside credentialed teachers that examine and interrogate the groups beliefs about teaching and learning, examining contradictions between beliefs and practices, and continually reflecting on how their personal identities interfaces with their development of their identify as an educator of diverse learners.

Additionally, teacher preparation programs should guide teacher candidates to view their future classrooms from the perspective of DisCrit Classroom Ecology. DisCrit Classroom Ecology highlights the interconnections of living systems, and calls specific attention to the interactions between organisms. DisCrit Classroom Ecology also calls attention to the history of knowledge creation and the resulting social interactions of people with one another and their environment (Annamma & Morrision, 2018). Two significant components of DisCrit Classroom Ecology that need to be emphasized by teacher educators are DisCrit resistance and DisCrit pedagogy. Grounding in the philosophy of DisCrit resistance, teachers need to be taught how to engage students labeled with disabilities with a discourse that allows them to make connections between their lived experiences and oppression, and the space to develop their own point of view concerning those experiences. DisCrit resistance incorporates both transformative teacher resistance and transformative student resistance aimed at ongoing and continuous interrogation of beliefs about disability, and teacher responsibilities.

For example, transformative teacher and student resistance takes place when teachers can choose to explore with students the hegemonic tensions created by the dominant ideology that insists that the ideal form is white, male, abled, and heterosexual and that those who do not conform to that norm deserve to be punished (Flores, 2015; Romero, Arces, & Cammarota,

2009). Teacher education programs need to realign their practices so that teacher candidates need to demonstrate their understanding of socio-cultural dynamics and how to facilitate critical dialogues prior to being awarded a teaching credential. Lastly, teacher candidates need to internalize the concepts that are deeply rooted in the work of scholars who prioritize care, hope, and love in the classroom (Darder, 2017; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire & Freire, 1998; hooks, 2003; Morrell, 2014; Valenzuela, 2010). If educators are to view all children as having gifts and their actions in the classroom as gifts, then all teachers need to understand how to respond to difference as a gift, not a deficit.

As noted by Freire (1968), classrooms can be a space where dominant ideologies are perpetuated, or spaces where liberatory ideas are taught and emancipation can occur. Teacher education programs for inclusive education need to be grounded in educational practices that facilitate the development of critical consciousness and courage within teachers to persistently surface and challenge that dominant ideologies that contribute to deficit notions and excuse general education teachers from taking responsibility for the learning and well-being of all students.



*Figure 3. Summary of implications. Adapted from “Reframing Urban Education Discourse: A Conversation with and for Teacher Educators,” by W. J. Blanchett and J. Wynne, 2007. *Theory into Practice*, 46(3), pp. 187-193, Copyright 2007 by the Taylor and Francis Group; “Beyond Inclusion,” *School Administrator*, 60(3), pp. 36-39, Copyright 2007 by the School Superintendents Association; “Multicultural Issues in Special Education: A Call for Responsibility in Research, Practice, and Teacher Preparation,” by G. Webb-Johnson, and B. Townsend, 2004, in A. M. Sorrells, H. Rieth, and P. T. Sindelar (Eds.) *Critical Issues in Special Education: Access, Diversity, and Accountability*, pp. 38-56, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Copyright 2004 by Pearson.*

Future Research

Future research should investigate special education teachers’ beliefs about students labeled with learning disability to explore the ways in which deficit perspectives about disability impact the attitudes and actions of special education teachers. Given the substantial impact that deficit notions have on current educational discourse, special education teachers as a group need to be studied in order to understand how deficit perspectives shape their beliefs and interactions with students labeled with a disability. Coupled with an exploration of the impact of deficit notions of disability on special education teachers, there is a need to examine the phenomenon of racialized trauma (Menaken, 2017) and how this contributes to all teacher’s ability to abdicate or deny their responsibility to pay greater attention to the quality of life of students labeled with a learning disability in general education classrooms. Another area for additional research includes identifying effective models of professional development and modes of professional learning that

shift teachers' deficit perspectives about various groups of students. These investigations should focus on both individual reflective processes and group mediated experiences. Lastly, future research should collect narratives from students labeled with a learning disability to better understand their conceptualization of disability and their lived experiences of being included in general education with a disability label. The student perspective is overwhelmingly missing from scholarship on inclusion, special education, and disability studies. In order fill this critical gap in the literature, however, there needs to be a serious examination of the structural and institutional barriers, specifically the current configuration of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol that constructs roadblocks to including student voices and experiences in educational research.

Conclusion

This study of general education teachers' beliefs about inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability used the qualitative method of Q methodology to collect data from eight secondary general education core content teachers. The theoretical framework used to analyze the data was Critical Disability Studies, specifically DisCrit, which emphasized the social construction of disability and the use of disability as a marker of oppression. The data from this study bore that general education teachers do not believe they are qualified to teach students labeled with a learning disability and subsequently do not take responsibility for the learning of students labeled with learning disabilities in their class. These beliefs expose a significant limit of inclusion.

Despite its widespread practice, the inclusion of students labeled with a learning disability in general education classrooms is limiting because general education teachers do not

believe they are capable of teaching students labeled a disability. Inclusion is further disabling for students labeled with a learning disability because general education teachers distance themselves from having to take responsibility for the learning and well-being of students labeled with a learning disability. In order to create schools that practice inclusive education, principals need to approach their work as school leaders for social justice in order to lead schools where teachers hold an unwavering commitment to the beliefs that all children can learn, all children need to feel they belong, and all teachers are responsible for teaching all students by incorporating various components of a DisCrit Classroom Ecology framework.

Lastly, as a proactive measure, teacher preparation programs need to enrich the field of education with general education teachers who have developed critical consciousness and courage to persistently surface and challenge dominant ideologies that contribute to deficit notions and excuse all teachers from being supportive and nurturing towards all students. Limitations of this study are the beliefs of other educational professionals are not included and these findings are not intended to be generalized, but to offer an example of how to investigate general education teachers' beliefs about inclusion and students labeled with a learning disability, and the need for critical reforms aimed at teacher preparation programs with the explicit purpose of facilitating inclusive education. Necessary future research includes the investigation of special education teachers' beliefs and how those are influenced by deficit notions of disability, models and modes of professional learning and teacher preparation that dismantle deficit thinking, and narratives from students who have been labeled with a learning disability about their experiences being included in general education classes.

Epilogue

How has this study changed how I think about the questions of inclusion? My career in special education began as a self-contained teacher. My students were segregated from their peers for the entirety of their school day and every day, during all three years I was in that position, I knew what was happening was inherently wrong. Having moved through being a Resource Specialist, where I supported students labeled with a disability who were included in general education for the majority of their school day, and now as an administrator in Special Education, I am expressly concerned about our treatment of students labeled with a disability both in general education and special education classrooms.

The practice of teaching needs to evolve beyond popular notions of normality, disability, inclusion, and the limited responsibilities of general education teachers. Disability discrimination is pervasive within education and its acceptance and replication is frightening and disheartening. I believe that educational leaders of color have a particular responsibility to stand in solidarity with individuals labeled as disabled, given the substantive links between ableism and racism. As Freire (1968) shared,

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 16)

In order for education to become a practice of freedom, all deficit-based notions of disability need to be removed from educational discourse and practice, and collectively as

educators, we need to fulfill our mandate to ensure that all children experience an education that is validating, nurturing, and critical. Under most of the current conditions, I believe that inclusion is dangerous and damaging for students labeled with disabilities. Under critically conscious conditions, I believe their inclusion can be emancipatory for all students, particularly students labeled with a learning disability.

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