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Let the Children Come to Me: Accommodating and Embracing Catholic High School Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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by

Hani Zubi

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table **Page**

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure **Page**

ABSTRACT

Let the Children Come to Me: Accommodating and Embracing Catholic High School Students with Disabilities

by

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Current state and federal legislation mandate public schools to provide a vast array of educational services for students with disabilities. Catholic high schools are, for the most part, exempt from laws requiring them to provide those same services. Although many Catholic schools attempt to assist students with disabilities, the students they are willing to accept and accommodate generally have learning disabilities categorized as mild to moderate, who may not need the scope and breadth of services available to them in public schools. However, they are bound by their identity as Catholic to include and embrace all members of the community. This qualitative study employed interviews of four administrators and eight teachers to assess the extent to which teachers and administrators at one coeducational suburban Catholic high school felt spiritually and professionally called to accommodate students with disabilities and to encounter the ways teachers and administrators at this school put the call of Catholic social teaching and the obligations of social justice into a relationship of care for students with disabilities. Findings indicated little formal preparation and infrequent professional development for teachers accommodating students with disabilities combined with inadequate resources.

These deficiencies were countered by professionalism, passion, and a passionate call to care on the part of educators. The findings support the need for Catholic high schools to begin engaging in conversation surrounding the best ways to support and train administration and faculty to improve current accommodation practices and to expand their current offerings to students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many students with moderate to severe learning disabilities have been directed away from Catholic schools to the public-school system. This mirrors my experience teaching in Catholic high schools for 17 years. Research has shown that this should come as no surprise. Students with developmental disabilities rarely attended Catholic schools (Burke & Griffin, 2016). Those who were accepted had, for the most part, only limited and mild learning disabilities. According to Bello (2006), only 5.6% of Catholic schools served students with moderate/severe disabilities. When Catholic high school principals identified the types of instructional services provided to students with disabilities enrolled in their schools, 8.6% reported that no additional services were available for students with disabilities at their schools. According to Boyle and Hernandez (2016), only 4.9% reported that full-time special education classrooms were available for students with disabilities at their schools. Thirty-seven percent of principals reported that their schools provided support services delivered by a special education teacher in the general education classroom (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016).

This has been the state of accommodation for students with learning disabilities at Catholic high schools in the United States. It has mirrored my experience at one coed Catholic high school in urban southern California, where few students with disabilities were enrolled in the school. The learning disabilities of those who were enrolled have been mild to moderate. There have been no formal individualized education programs (IEP). Rather, teachers have been approached by administration and given some rough guidelines about the types of accommodations needed by certain students. While most teachers on campus have been willing

and committed to teaching children with disabilities, very few have had the training necessary to fully engage students with disabilities. Furthermore, there has remained a small group of teachers who (for lack of training and/or lack of confidence), have been reluctant to embrace accommodating students with learning disabilities and who have felt that those students would be best served in the public-school system.

According to Moreau et al. (2006), cost, usually defined in dollars, was often the first consideration when discussing the scarcity of greater accommodation for students with disabilities in Catholic high schools. The financial realities of providing services for children with disabilities in our Catholic schools presented major barriers to building effective programs (Moreau et al., 2006). When pressed with this reality, principals echoed the research and added further reasons for the accommodation gap. Catholic school principals identified the major obstacles at their schools, and three themes emerged from their responses: (a) financial constraints, (b) teachers' lack of experience and training in working with children with disabilities, and (c) teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding inclusion (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). Catholic schools may also have been, "limited in their capacity to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners due to an underlying belief on the part of many Catholic educators that children with disabilities would be better served elsewhere" (Moreau et al., 2006, p. 466).

Statement of the Problem

To be clear, I have not mentioned the wider spectrum of disabilities in general. In this study, when speaking of disabilities, I have been referring to learning and intellectual disabilities, as described in the definitions found in this chapter. Physical disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, respiratory disorders, epilepsy, and hearing and visual impairments

have been beyond the scope of this study. This study has been limited to the experience of Catholic high school teachers' interaction with students with learning and intellectual disabilities.

To what extent should Catholic high schools concern themselves with accommodating students with disabilities? Catholic schools have been free to accept or deny admission to any student they wish. They have received only a small, proportional amount of federal assistance to help cover costs (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* [IDEA], 2004). Federal law has required public schools to provide free, appropriate education to students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). The obvious and easy answer has been send Catholic students with disabilities to public schools, where the necessary funding and qualified personnel have been waiting for them.

This may not be as simple as it seems. There have been many pressing issues facing Catholic high schools. Today, their numbers have been decreasing as they face competition from public schools and from public charter schools. Accompanying this worrisome change have been some silver linings and some points to consider. Although the portion of private schools responsible for U.S. education has been declining for decades, private schools have continued to play a significant role in many communities of each region in the United States (Ee et al., 2018). Ee et al. (2018) demonstrated that private schools have shown signs of adapting to the changing needs of families. This change has varied by region and by sector, but the overall pace of change experienced by private schools has remained sluggish compared to public schools (Ee et al., 2018). The authors contended that private schools needed to seriously consider how to incorporate the nation's growing diversity into their system in order to offer more diversified interpersonal contact and to develop appropriate social skills for their students who will work and study in a diverse society (Ee et al., 2018). This diversity has included students with

disabilities. The research has offered many reasons why Catholic schools should concern themselves with accommodating students with disabilities. Long and Schuttloffel (2006) began with the identity of Catholic schools. They contended that, "It is the obligation of all members of the Christian community to develop a deeper understanding of those with disabilities and to work to integrate them into society. This obligation includes integrating students with special needs into Catholic schools and parish education programs" (Long & Schuttloffel, 2006, p. 451). Crowley and Wall (2007) asserted that "The Catholic Church has consistently reached out to assist people with disabilities, and greater inclusion of children with disabilities in Catholic schools is a natural and inevitable extension of this history" (p. 519). The *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2019-2020 Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment, and Staffing* demonstrated that Catholic school enrollment numbers have been dwindling, and many Catholic schools have been closing (National Catholic Educational Association [NCEA], 2018). Their pace of change has been sluggish, but their continuing significant role and the fact that they have shown signs of improvement have been indications that there has been demand for their services and that the understanding and willingness to change has continued to exist (Ee et al., 2008).

However, Catholic and other private schools have been lagging still behind public schools in overall accommodation of students with disabilities (NCEA, 2018). The reason the issue of accommodating children with disabilities in Catholic high schools has needed to be discussed has been largely due to their very nature: their Catholic identity. Catholic social teaching (CST) has instructed Church members to respect the life and dignity of the human person and to embrace the call to family, community, and participation (United States

Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1998). The National Council of Catholic Bishops issued this statement,

> Since the parish is the door to participation in the Christian experience, it is the responsibility of both pastors and laity to assure that those doors are always open. Cost must never be the controlling consideration limiting the welcome offered to those among us with disabilities, since provision of access to religious functions is a pastoral duty. (USCCB, 1998, p. 2).

Catholic service institutions have gone far beyond the church doors. There have been Catholic hospitals, homeless shelters, thrift stores, food banks, and, of course, schools. CST has applied directly to developing inclusive service delivery in Catholic schools through the tenets of human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized. Catholic schools have been morally obligated to create an environment, curriculum, and support structure to ensure the dignity and common good of all of its students. CST has compelled the faithful to ameliorate barriers, including disabilities, poverty, racism, and home language, that inhibit students from succeeding in schools (Scanlan, 2009). Following this logic, since all Catholic schools have been mandated to adhere to CST, they have been no less obligated to create an inclusive education system that meets the needs of students with disabilities.

Beyond the catechism of the Church and the statements from the Bishops have been the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who the Catholic Church has taught is, as the Son, one of the three persons of God. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mark 10:14, Catholic Online Bible, 2020). Catholic schools and, in particular, a Catholic high school in southern California, who have been neither

enrolling many students with disabilities nor providing adequately for those they do accept have needed to reflect upon whether they have been fulfilling the obligations of CST. Those Catholic schools without a clear commitment to students with disabilities should have been needing to ask themselves if they have been fully serving their students, parents, teachers, and their community. They have been needing to consider the degree to which they are practicing social justice.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?
2. In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?
3. To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities?

Purpose

The purpose of this study has been to learn the methods employed and the extent to which one Catholic high school has offered accommodation to students with disabilities in its community. It has been my hope that the research would demonstrate that one school's example may shed light on a situation that must be confronted by most Catholic secondary schools: the need to accept and accommodate those members of the Catholic community with disabilities. I have observed the processes through which students with disabilities are accommodated at a coeducational, Catholic high school in suburban Los Angeles county.

Through research and interviews, I learned what kinds of learning disabilities the administration of this school felt could be accommodated, and how severe disabilities must have been before the school felt that students with those disabilities could not have been accommodated. The accommodations offered to those students who were accepted and the steps taken by administration and teachers to accommodate and integrate those students into the student body were also explored. The research shed light upon those that were assigned to supervise the accommodation of students with disabilities, and the steps taken to accommodate those students, including the creation of any action plans. This study also discovered the extent to which there was any cooperation with the local Unified School District. Part of this research included asking about any disability accommodations in action, including how teachers were brought into the process and the extent to which they were empowered to make accommodations and changes as they saw fit.

Additional insights revealed by the research included what training (if any) the faculty at this school received to teach students with disabilities, what support mechanisms the school offered for them, and how comfortable teachers were accommodating their students with disabilities. This study delved into these questions as part of the answer to the larger research questions of the dissertation. The policies envisioned and enforced by the administration combined with the ability, confidence, and efficacy of the faculty, helped to answer the broader question of the extent to which students with disabilities were effectively accommodated and the degree to which they received social justice.

Significance

The study demonstrated significance in the following ways. Catholic high schools in general may have appreciated the further extent to which they must strive in order to meet the call of CST and further nourish and expand social justice for its vulnerable students. In light of lowered enrollment and dwindling resources, Catholic schools should have been concerning themselves with trying to reach only those students whose needs could have been easily and cheaply met. However, this may have been short sighted and clearly has not answered the call of Catholic Bishops to meet the needs of the entire Catholic community (USCCB, 1998). The reputation enjoyed by Catholic high schools as places where academic rigor meets holistic support could only have been enhanced through embracing students with disabilities. Furthermore, the call of CST has required Catholic schools, by their very definition, to do all in their realistic power to reach those students whose help is greatest. It has not been socially just to simply hand them off to the public-school districts for the sake of convenience.

This study may help Catholic high school administrators to be able to obtain a clearer picture of the need to provide the necessary framework for their teachers to accommodate, engage, and educate children with disabilities more willingly, confidently, and effectively. If teachers have not possessed the education and tools necessary to engage their students with disabilities, they will not be able to effectively meet their needs, no matter how hard they have tried and no matter how good their intentions have been. Success will have varied and any truly effective learning will more likely have been the exception than the rule. Providing teachers with the necessary training will help to ensure that they can effectively meet the needs of their students and to partner with administration and parents.

It is clear that Catholic high schools (and private schools in general) have been losing their ability to maintain their student populations (NCEA, 2018). Catholic high schools may be able to maintain or even increase student enrollment by providing accommodations more members of their larger community. One of the reasons for this may be, in part, due to the perceived inability of Catholic schools to accommodate students with disabilities due to cost, and the corresponding reliance upon public school districts to accommodate those students because of the lower cost to parents and the greater degree of resources available to public schools and their legal mandates. If there had been a significant population of students with disabilities who can be effectively accommodated in Catholic high schools, then it may be possible and preferable for parents in the Catholic community to send their students with disabilities to Catholic high schools. With careful application of special needs policy in the context of CST, Catholic high schools may be able to appreciate the further extent to which they must strive in order to meet CST's call to further nourish and expand social justice for its vulnerable students. The reputation enjoyed by Catholic high schools as places where academic rigor meets holistic support can only be enhanced through further embracing students with special needs. It is not within the scope of social justice simply to hand such students off to the public-school districts for the sake of expedience. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Mark 10:14, Catholic Online Bible, 2020). The call of Jesus and of CST requires Catholic schools, by their very definition, to do all in their realistic power to reach those students whose need for help is greatest.

Theoretical Framework

The blueprints upon which my study was framed included CST and ethic of care. The Catholic school setting has been inextricably tied to the tenets and beliefs of the Catholic Church. Teachers who have chosen this setting (both diocesan and independent Catholic schools) as their vocation have been expected to follow the teachings of the Church and instructions passed down from the Vatican through the hierarchy. Catholic school teachers have been called to respect the dignity of all humanity, including the poor and the vulnerable, and to embrace their students as co-participants in the greater Catholic community. The ways teachers have answered this call are as varied as the teachers themselves. However, CST's instruction to answer the call to community has aligned well with the principal foundation of the ethic of care theory, best expressed by Nel Noddings' work in the 1980s: that caring was a reciprocal relationship between caring and cared-for, in this case, teacher and student (Hawk, 2017).

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has called upon Catholics to act alongside the oppressed in an effort to end repressive situations and structures (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015). At its core, the foundations for CST have been found in the Old Testament where God hears the pleas of his chosen people, in bondage, and guides them on their exodus out of Egypt. Thus, He has acted to end their oppression under the Egyptian social structure of slavery. Building upon this and similar Biblical themes (Old & New Testaments), the USCCB identified seven tenets of CST (USCCB, 2005). Three of these, the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation, were used in the study's discussion of how Catholic schools should meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Applying CST to education, Storz and Nestor (2007) stated that the life and dignity of human persons is "at the very core of our vocation as Catholic educators" (p. 10). Every individual is made in the image and likeness of God, he or she is deserving of "equal dignity" (Mucci, 2015). The preferential option for the poor has asked Catholic educators to place themselves in the plight of the poor and to help students and, using that perspective, help all students and their families. Catholic educators should engage their students through the example of Jesus the teacher. Storz and Nestor (2007) connected CST to the community aspect of Catholic schools and the notion of being one family. Teaching according to the principles of CST means that Catholic school educators should have been embracing and engaging each student on terms appropriate for their situation. There has been no "one-size-fits-all" course of action. Mucci (2015) asserted, "Ultimately, the tenets of CST encourage teachers to value the individuality of students" (p. 24).

Ethic of Care

Ethic of care has been a theory that "caring is reactive and responsive" (Noddings, 2013, p. 19). It has been a reciprocal relationship between those caring and the cared-for. This relationship has been marked by engrossment and motivational displacement. Goldstein (1998) summed up engrossment as a situation where the caring opens herself to the cared-for with her full attention. The caring was wholly attuned to the needs of the cared-for, feeling with (not for) the cared-for. Motivational displacement followed engrossment. "When the one-caring is feeling with the cared-for, fully receiving him, his motives become her motives" (Goldstein, 1998, p. 656). Being a reciprocal relationship, "the effectiveness and fulfillment of the 'one-caring' has depended on how the 'cared-for' receives and responds" (Pazey, 1993, p. 8). "A caring teacher,

listening to students as they express the need to have their language respected, can show the needed respect and, at the same time, offer cogent reasons for students to learn standard forms" (Noddings, 2005b, p. 156).

Ethic of care also has mandated a degree of competency on the part of the caregiver. Effective caring requires a more nuanced approach than simple instinct. According to research, "The ethic of care, then, both elevates care to a central value in human life and recognizes that care requires a complicated process of judgment" (Tronto, 1998, p. 17). People have needed to make moral judgments, political judgments, technical judgments, and psychological judgments in their everyday caring activities. Educators must have been ready to make many of these judgements every day with all of their students, especially their students with disabilities. Tronto (1998) concluded, "Caring, then, is neither simple nor banal; it requires know-how and judgment, and to make such judgments as well as possible becomes the moral task of engaging in care" (p. 17). In tandem with CST's lack of a "one-size-fits-all" approach, ethic of care has established no specific rules for every situation. Rather, caring has been context-specific, rooted in particular situations and individuals. Educators who have been hoping to better accommodate students with disabilities should have been willing to engage in inventive, creative, and collaborative practices, rather than trying to hammer a square peg into a traditional round hole.

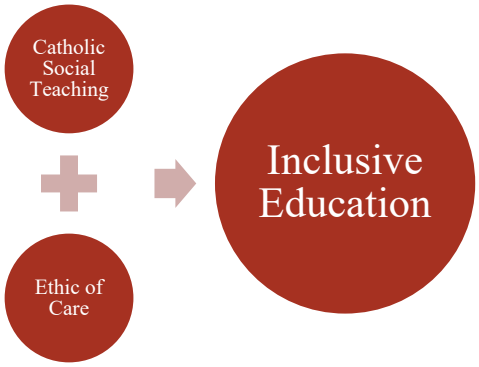
Intersection of the Theories

The theoretical framework of CST and ethic of care have formed the lens through which the study's research questions were viewed. They intersected at the points of motivation and praxis (see Figure 1). It has been the complementary aspects of the sources of motivation in each of these theories that have allowed them to seamlessly mesh in educators as individuals. A

spiritual call, such as that from CST, may have propelled educators to serve the needs of students with disabilities through extrinsic motivation from church leaders. The holistic aspect of ethic of care, that caring is a reciprocal relationship rooted in responsibility, has provided an element of intrinsic motivation. The first research question asked the extent to which teachers at a private Catholic high school have been prepared to support students with disabilities. This question spoke to the ethic of care's element of competence. Competence, in light of ethic of care, has meant following through with enough adequacy to engage in an effective relationship of caring (Noddings, 2013).

Figure 1

Graphic Representation of the Intersection of the Theoretical Framework



The second research question asked educators to discuss the ways they put the call of CST and the obligations of social justice into a relationship of care for students with disabilities. The lens of the theoretical framework has been clear in this question. Though the spiritual call may vary, educators may still have been putting the call of social justice into practice. In a Catholic institution, there may have been more familiarity with the precepts of CST, thus a stronger connection with the elements of caring found therein. Methods and practices used in a

caring educator-student relationship have also been engendered by ethic of care's elements of attentiveness, competence, and responsiveness.

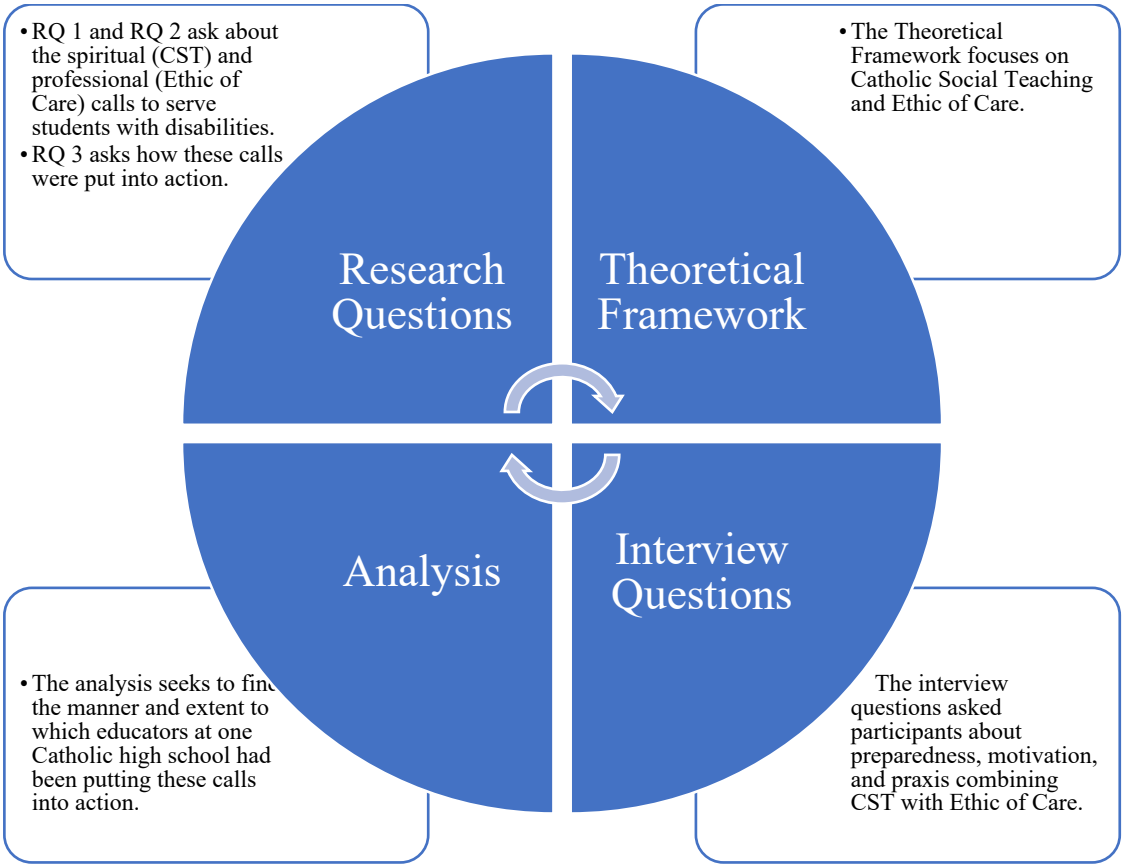
The third and final research question asked the extent to which teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school have been integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities. This question most clearly engendered an example of the intersection of the theoretical framework of CST and the ethic of care. Through the interview process, educators revealed the extent to which their practices of accommodation of students with disabilities addressed CST's principles and guidelines as derived from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church. The interviews also shed light on the degree of innate human caring for those with whom we come into contact, as described in the ethic of care.

The interview questions were developed from viewing the research questions in light of the theoretical framework. Questions such as "In what ways do you feel compelled to serve students with disabilities?" and "Why did you choose to teach at a Catholic school?" sought to help answer the first research question's fundamental question of motivation. Elements of CST and ethic of care were addressed in the second research question through areas of the interview that asked participants to identify things such as "What strategies do you use for accommodating students with disabilities?" and "What equitable grading methods do you employ for students with disabilities in inclusive settings?" The final analysis of the interviews brought the story to life contextually. The elements of meaning from each educator's experience were investigated and analyzed through the lenses of the theoretical framework. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the relationship described above, starting with the research questions, informed

by the theoretical framework, leading to the interview questions, and finally helping to contextualize the final analysis.

Figure 2

Graphic Representation of the Theoretical/Practical Relationships in the Study



Methodology

This study was a qualitative study of the accommodation of students with disabilities at a coeducational independent Catholic high school in southern California. This framework allowed me to best observe first hand the experiences of the stakeholders in this study. The study included interviews with members of the faculty and administration in order to learn how the needs of students with disabilities are addressed by the school. The interviews with

administration revealed what policies regarding students with disabilities exists. Key members of the administration for this study included the principal, the vice-principal, the director of student learning, and the learning specialist. Through the interview process, I determined what available resources and methods for accommodating students with disabilities were in place, including praxis for administration and faculty.

Limitations

I fully acknowledge that one Catholic school, during one point in time, in a limited study could not have answered every question there may be regarding accommodating students with disabilities. Limitations to this study included the size of the sample, which was one school in southern California. It would have been very challenging to say if this one school was representative of many Catholic schools in the country. The sample size of 12 teachers and administrators, however, did participate to the degree envisioned by the researcher.

Delimitations

This study was limited only to faculty and administration of one Catholic high school in southern California, during one school year. I interviewed four administrators and eight faculty members regarding the degree to which they welcomed students with disabilities, their ability to accommodate them, and the methods they used to engage students with disabilities.

Positionality of the Researcher

It is important that I placed myself in context within this study. I chose the school where I was conducting research as a study of convenience. It was relatively close to where I lived and to Loyola Marymount University. It was my alma mater. It was also where I worked. I came into contact with members of the sample group almost daily, and faced many of the same challenges

they faced regarding students with disabilities. As a faculty member, I retained an insider's position on the faculty portion of the research.

Assumptions

I made three basic assumptions in this study. First, I assumed that participants would be open and honest throughout the study. Second, I assumed that, as teachers and administrators in a Catholic school setting, the participants would already have some knowledge of Catholic tenets of care and social justice. Finally, I assumed that teachers and administrators at this school did, in fact, have experience encountering students with disabilities.

Definition of Key Terms

***Accommodations*—**Changes in the way a student accesses learning, without changing the actual content (Oliver, 2008).

***Catholic Social Teaching (CST)*—**CST is comprised of doctrines on matters of human dignity and common good in society, based on and inseparable from the Catholic Church's understanding of human life and human dignity (USCCB, 2005).

***Cared-for*—**The person on the receiving end of caring. In the student teacher relationship, the student is the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

***Ethic of Care*—**A relational way of interacting with others. It requires a commitment to act a certain way on behalf of the cared-for, or a commitment to thinking about what one might do on behalf of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

***Inclusive Education*—**All students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff (Oliver, 2008). Essentially,

students with special education needs are attending the general school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes 100% of the school day (Idol, 2006).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—Federal law that governs special education in all schools receiving federal school aid requiring each state to meet or exceed the law (Oliver, 2008).

Intellectual Disability—A disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities [AAIDD], 2019).

Integrated Comprehensive Services—An array of services and supports centered on differentiated learning that all students receive in an integrated heterogeneous environment (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)—Educational setting where a child with disabilities can receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) designed to meet his or her education needs while being educated with peers without disabilities (Oliver, 2008).

One Caring—The person who is caring for someone else. In the student teacher relationship, the teacher is the one caring (Noddings, 1984).

Response to Intervention (RTI)—Approach to special education focusing on providing students with disabilities high-quality instruction and early interventions with integrity and monitoring how students respond to those interventions (Scanlan, 2009).

Students with Disabilities—Any student: (a) with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments

(including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this chapter as "emotional disturbance"), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (b) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 2004).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 laid the foundation of the study, identifying the research problem, the research questions, and a broad overview of the methodology of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on the topic, focusing on current practices accommodating students with disabilities in Catholic high schools, legal obligations and limitations facing those schools, and perceptions and attitudes of educators toward inclusion of students with disabilities. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this study in more specific terms. In Chapter 3, I lay out the setting and participants of the study, discuss methods of data organization and analysis, and present the criteria for trustworthiness. Chapter 4 reports the findings of this study, including the participants and their experiences in the context of the theoretical framework. Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss the findings in light of the research questions and the extent to which the research may impact further study and praxis in the field.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to investigate the extent to which teachers and administrators at one coeducational suburban Catholic high school felt spiritually and professionally called to accommodate students with disabilities, and the ways teachers and administrators at this school have put the call of CST and the obligations of social justice into a relationship of care for students with disabilities, I narrowed the focus of my research to answer three research questions.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?
2. In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?
3. To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities?

I chose three broad avenues to explore in my search for the degree to which Catholic high schools accommodate students with disabilities. The first was an examination of legal policies regarding the education of students with disabilities. Next was a review of the current state of accommodation or inclusion of students with disabilities in Catholic high schools. The last area of review was the literature regarding perceptions and attitudes of administrators and teachers toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

First, it was important to investigate the role of federal law mandating accommodation of students with disabilities in Catholic high schools. While the theories of CST and ethic of care have been important motivating factors guiding the decision to accommodate students with learning disabilities, they have not carried the secular penalties of the law. The *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (2004) mandated free and appropriate education (FAPE) in a least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students whose disability adversely affects their educational performance. According to IDEA (2004), states have been mandated to follow these laws and, as long as states follow the overall process in IDEA (2004), they have been afforded leeway to determine some of the details. In order to evaluate the current accommodations offered by Catholic high schools, it was essential to ascertain whether or not Catholic schools fell under the umbrella of these federal laws, specifically IDEA (2004).

The next part of the study was a review of the literature regarding Catholic high schools that accommodate students with disabilities, including the breadth and depth of those accommodations. I hoped to obtain a broad picture of the current state of accommodation and inclusion that would possibly help inform my research regarding practices at the high school that I chose as the focus of my study. It was also important to learn the extent to which accommodation or inclusion were driven by orders from above (i.e., dioceses or boards of regents), self-motivated on the part of the parents, administration, faculty, and students of the school community, or perhaps driven by market forces working to guide supply to demand. It may have been helpful to those seeking educational reform to juxtapose these considerations against the role that CST played in those Catholic high schools which chose to accept, accommodate, or include students with disabilities.

The last topic of analysis was a review of the literature on perceptions and attitudes of administrators and teachers toward inclusion of students with disabilities. Catholic schools in the United States today are taught by religious and lay faculty whose adherence to the letter of Catholic law varies from individual to individual. However, it may be assumed that most teachers who choose to teach at a Catholic school do so in general agreement with the moral conventions of the Church. There may be an expectation among teachers at Catholic high schools that their students would be better supported at home and more motivated to succeed than public school students. The faculty may feel unprepared or underpaid, and the extent to which any particular teacher is willing to engage students with disabilities varies. There may also be a conception (in my experience usually warranted) that Catholic schools do not have the funds or other resources necessary for full and comprehensive inclusion of students with learning disabilities. Catholic school teachers may also feel underqualified, considering there is no federal legal requirement for Catholic school teachers to be credentialed to teach. My research involved lay teachers at one Catholic high school. A review of the literature was important to determine a baseline against which these teachers could be measured.

Students with Disabilities and the Law

There is a difference between services to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the public-school system and those found in private schools, especially Catholic schools. Some private schools have large endowments and the resources necessary to engage with students with multiple levels and types of disabilities. On balance, however, Catholic schools do not have the same resources available to them as other private schools, and certainly not as much as public schools. Resources do not tell the whole story, however. Where most private schools, including

Catholic schools may choose to serve the needs of students with disabilities, public schools must do so. Legislation such as Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990*, and IDEA of 2004 mandate the education of students with special needs in public schools.

Catholic school educators may not have the same access to special education coordinators as those in public schools do. They may have a weak grasp of the laws that affect them or even that pertain to students with disabilities. Even general classroom (non-special-needs) public-school teachers may not be as aware of the legalities of teaching students with disabilities as one might think. O'Connor et al. (2016) conducted a study of public-school teachers to determine their familiarity, knowledge, and level of training regarding the provisions specified under IDEA (2004) and Section 504. O'Connor et al. (2016) contended that "teachers are usually the first to identify children who may be in need of special services and are usually the ones who refer children for evaluation," therefore they should have familiarity with the laws affecting students with disabilities (O'Connor et al., 2016, p. 7).

The authors found that many of the participants were lacking essential information about IDEA (2004) and had limited knowledge of the provisions in Section 504 (O'Connor et al., 2016). They found that teachers were typically misinformed and lacked knowledge about special education law. Just over 20% had any special education coursework, less than half could demonstrate a general understanding of the provisions of IDEA, and just over a third understood the basics of Section 504 (O'Connor et al., 2016). If public school teachers who educate students with disabilities in an inclusive setting have a generally poor grounding in the rights and responsibilities conferred by the law, it is easy to imagine the magnitude of the lack of such

knowledge among Catholic school teachers, who have no teaching credential requirements. The lack of this knowledge may impede the ability of students with disabilities to receive the help they need to succeed in school. Educational mission aside, Catholic institutions must be cognizant of the laws regarding their interaction with students with disabilities and the extent to which ignorance of those laws could lead to lawsuits.

If Catholic schools are not willing or able to accommodate students with learning disabilities on par with public schools, then that would contrast with federal legislation regarding the education of students with special needs in public schools. In 1954, the Supreme Court gave its opinion in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Although remembered as a civil rights case that began the end of legal segregation in U.S. public schools, the court's ruling set the stage for other challenges (including special needs) when it wrote that,

> In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms. (*Brown v Board of Education*, 1954)

Federal policy regarding students with special needs moved forward in the decades following *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). In 1970, Congress enacted the *Education of the Handicapped Act* (1970), hoping to encourage states to develop educational programs for students with special needs *(Education of the Handicapped Act*, 1970). Later, the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EHA) of 1975 sought to push states forward when it stated that children with learning disabilities, "have a right to education, and to establish a process by which

State and local educational agencies may be held accountable for providing educational services for all handicapped children" (*Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 1975).

Section 504

The *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973 is the first federal civil rights law protecting the rights of the disabled. Section 504 of the law states that,

> no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, as defined in section 7(20), solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance. (*Rehabilitation Act*, 1973)

The reach of the act is broad, covering any institution that receives federal funding for any reason. If a private school is the recipient of such funds, it may fall under the umbrella of the act, therefore liable to accommodate students with disabilities. Furthermore, according to the law, to receive services under Section 504, no specific diagnosis (e.g., ADHD) must be made (O'Connor et al., 2016).

Avoiding specific diagnoses, the act broadly categorizes anyone with a physical or mental impairment that "substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities" (*Rehabilitation Act*, 1973). Of course, for students, school is a major life activity. Once a student is categorized with an impairment, the next step is to determine if a student is otherwise eligible to participate in school activities. In this case, otherwise eligible refers to students that could, with reasonable accommodation, engage in activities on campus. Reasonable accommodations may include anything from permitting a child to be accompanied to school by a service dog to modifying a behavior policy, or providing a hearing interpreter (Russo et al., 2009). According to

a study of Catholic school systems by Durow (2007), Catholic schools employ special educators, make use of special educational materials, have smaller classes, use services provided by the local public school district, and use classroom teacher adjustments (Durow, 2007). In my experience, these minor adjustments have included allowing students longer time to complete assignments or exams, giving students outlines in advance, and offering modified exams. The goal is to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities as much as possible in an inclusive environment.

Broad definitions make it possible for many students without specific diagnoses to receive accommodations to which they would not previously have been legally entitled. Scanlan (2009) wrote that federal funding assistance has been interpreted by the courts,

> to take place in various forms, including participation in Title programs and National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs (*Hunt v. St. Peter School,* 1997), grants under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 (*Thomas* v. *Davidson Academy,* 1994), and funds indirectly received by way of public-school district placements *(P.N.* v. *Greco,* 2003, p. 27).

These and other forms of assistance would seem to indicate that, under Section 504, most Catholic schools and virtually all Diocesan Catholic schools receiving federal funding are legally obligated to accommodate students with special needs (Scanlan, 2009). Under the law, Catholic schools who receive federal funding must serve students with disabilities in a regular inclusive classroom environment thorough reasonable accommodation. As seen in Figure 3, these can include actions such as scheduling more frequent parent-teacher meetings, modifying the class schedule, or varied teaching materials. According to Schweinbeck (2001), “Schools also have the

duty to afford handicapped students an equal opportunity to participate in nonacademic services and activities with other students to the maximum extent possible" (p. 476).

Figure 3

Inclusive Accommodations for Generally Eligible Students

Communication	Organization and Management	Alternative Teaching Strategies	Grading Procedures
Teachers may want to:	Teachers may want to:	Teachers may want to:	Teachers may want to:
Develop daily or weekly journals between parent and school	Modify the class schedule	Adjust testing procedures (especially length of time)	Mark acceptable work, not mistakes
Schedule more frequent parent-teacher meetings	Allow the student more time to walk the hallways	Administer quizzes orally and record answers	Point out reversals and transposition of letters for correction, not count them wrong
Provide parents with a duplicate set of tests	Supply a study carrel in the classroom	Individualize classroom and homework assignments	Avoid placing student under pressure of time or competition
Network with other staff	Change the student's seat	Utilize technology	Accept typed homework assignments
Schedule building team meetings	Increase or decrease opportunities for movement in the classroom	Discontinue the use of dittos	Quietly repeat directions to the student after they have been given to the class
Maintain ongoing communication with the building principal	Reduce stimuli	Vary materials	Allow the student to dictate answers to exams
Communicate with outside agencies	Discuss health parameters with parents	Adjust reading level of material	
	Contact lunchroom if menu changes are requested		

Note. Adapted from "Section 504 and Catholic Schools" by N. L. Schweinbeck, 2001, *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 4*(4), 464-478. Copyright 2001 by Fordham University.

However, the very nature of broadly defined terms may prevent students with disabilities from receiving every accommodation to which they believe they are entitled. While reasonable accommodation might mean one thing to a student or the student's family, it may mean something very different in the eyes of the school. According to Schweinbeck (2001), Catholic

schools are prohibited by Section 504 from failing to differentiate service delivery to students with special needs under the excuse that, “I don’t discriminate because I treat everyone the same” (Schweinbeck, 2001, p. 477). Section 504 requires that disabled students have the chance to benefit from their educational placement, and schools must alter their educational practices and provide services to meet that need (Schweinbeck, 2001). However, Russo et al. (2009) discussed three conditions where a school is not required to provide accommodation to students who are otherwise eligible. The first is that schools do not have to provide accommodation to a student with disabilities if said accommodation would significantly alter the nature of the program. The second exception from accommodation under Section 504 is if the accommodation would impose an undue financial burden. Finally, a school could refuse accommodation to a student under Section 504 is if that student’s presence would create a substantial risk of injury to himself, herself, or others (Russo et al., 2009). A service animal might be a reasonable accommodation, but could be denied if another student on campus is severely allergic to it (Berry & Katsiyannis, 2012). For many Catholic schools, an out of Section 504 is the minimal requirement that private schools only need offer minor adjustments to their curriculum for students with special needs that would not cause a significant burden (Daggett, 2014). They may argue that operating at or near a loss, with aging facilities, and little appropriate human capital prevents them from being able to provide accommodations that may seem otherwise reasonable (Durow, 2007). These excuses may falter in the face of CST and the ethic of care, but they often stand up before the law (Russo et al., 2009).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

The ADA (1990) is a civil rights bill designed to build upon earlier protections granted under Section 504 of the *U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (LaFee, 2011). The law is wide-sweeping in the needs of those with disabilities, including students, even though not designed specifically to address special needs education. The goal of the act was "to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities" (*Americans with Disabilities Act*, 1990). The law seeks to protect individuals with disabilities by imposing legal obligations on private employers, public services, transportation, and accommodation. Under the law, employers may not discriminate against qualified applicants with disabilities. All new buses, trains, and subways must be accessible to persons with disabilities. The law mandates that new or refurbished public accommodations (e.g., hotels, stores, banks, theaters) be accessible, and that telephone companies provide relay services for hearing-impaired individuals (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Because of ADA (1990), public buildings, including schools, are now mandated to have ramps, elevators, and other means of assuring access to people with disabilities (LaFee, 2011). Since the subject of this study was education (specifically accommodation of students with disabilities), the review of the literature regarding the ADA (1990) focused primarily on those aspects of the law pertaining to schools.

In general, the ADA (1990) protects four broad categories of students from discrimination on the basis of disability. It covers students with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (considering any corrective measures they use, such as medication). It also covers students with a history of a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. A child who has a history

of acute asthma might fall into this category. The third group of students covered by the ADA (1990) would be those who are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (even without a diagnosis). Finally, students associated with people who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities fall under the auspices of this law, such as a child who has a sibling with a disability. Although, according to the law, this child does not have to be related to the person with the disability (Motwani, 2001).

Under the ADA (1990), all schools are required to make accommodations for students with special needs, in similar fashion as Section 504 (Motwani, 2001). These include admissions policies that do not screen out, or tend to screen out persons with disabilities; changes in policies, practices, or procedures; provision of auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication; and removal of physical barriers in existing program facilities (ADA, 1990). Catholic schools, as private entities, have to comply by providing these accommodations to the highest degree possible. Like Section 504, however, there are ways to legally avoid compliance. If an admissions policy is necessary for safe operation of the program, the school does not have to comply with the law. This exception could be hard to validate for most Catholic schools. A school would not have to comply if they could demonstrate that accommodation policies, practices, or procedures would fundamentally alter the nature of the program. The third exception would be if auxiliary aids and services necessary for accommodation would pose an undue burden (usually associated with monetary cost). Finally, in the case of the removal of barriers in an existing program, if the accommodations would require much difficulty or expense, the school would not have to comply with the law. The question of what constitutes a

reasonable accommodation comes up often, when administrators are faced with the challenge of accepting students with disabilities.

The ADA of 1990 contains five major titles, whose implications vary based upon whether an institution is public or private. Title I is concerned specifically with employment in the private sector, thus applicable to Catholic schools. Title I specifies that school administrators make reasonable accommodations for otherwise qualified individuals as soon as they are aware of the condition of a student with disabilities (Russo et al., 2009). There is no legal obligation upon school administrators to act until they are so informed. Title II covers employers in the public sector; there is no explicit obligation for private schools, except if that new construction would have to be ADA (1990) compliant. The bulk of ADA (1990) assistance to the disabled in buildings, transportation, parks, hotels, and theaters is found in Title III. Title IV is concerned with telecommunication access for the disabled. Title V contains miscellaneous provisions for the law, including the fact that no individual is forced to accept to accept an accommodation, aid, service, opportunity, or benefit which such individual chooses not to accept. Another important section of Title V makes it clear that the ADA (1990) sets the minimum legal bar for the treatment of people with disabilities, "nothing in this chapter shall be construed to apply a lesser standard than the standards applied under Title V of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*" (ADA, 1990). In other words, it does not preclude another federal or state law's requirements from being to be more encompassing or to go beyond those found in the ADA (1990).

The ADA of 1990 makes it clear that Catholic schools have a legal obligation to accommodate and serve students with disabilities. Attempts to legally avoid compliance with the

law may be argued successfully in a court of law but are more difficult to justify in the face of CST. Scanlan (2009) posed the crux of the dilemma,

> On the one hand, many of them [Catholic school administrators] sincerely strive to follow the moral obligations of CST and welcome all students. On the other hand, they know that they have underdeveloped special education service delivery systems, and they do a disservice when they accept students that they are not equipped to educate. Frequently, Catholic school educators conclude that they cannot, in good conscience, enroll students with special needs. (p. 547)

A study by Durow (2007) listed "insufficient teacher preparation and confidence, inaccessible buildings, and inconsistent commitment from parishes and boards" as the most significant barriers to improved service of students with special needs (p. 487). Insufficient teacher preparation and confidence, and inaccessible buildings may present financial difficulties, but as Catholic schools provide professional development and make incremental upgrades to their infrastructure, any cries of unreasonable accommodation may be harder to justify. The last impediment, lack of commitment, is not a financial burden and any Catholic school should, in good conscience, strive to overcome it. Truly, a Catholic school that claims to live within the context of CST can find little excuse not to embrace a commitment to serve students of their community with special needs.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act **(2004)**

The IDEA of 2004 has governed the provision of services for students with disabilities since its inception as the EHA in 1975. The purpose of the IDEA of 2004 was to increase the focus on accountability and improved outcomes by emphasizing reading, early intervention, and

research-based instruction by requiring that special education teachers be highly qualified. The act also sought to protect the rights of both children with disabilities and their parents (IDEA, 2004). Before passage of the EHA of 1975, only one in five students with disabilities attended a public school (LaFee, 2011). LaFee (2011) wrote "many states' policies explicitly excluded children with certain types of disabilities from their traditional schools, including children who were blind, deaf, or deemed 'emotional disturbed or mentally retarded'" (p. 51). More than 6.7 million students are labeled as having a disability under 13 categories recognized by IDEA (2004) (Sack-Min, 2007; see Table 1). Although the IDEA of 2004 called for highly qualified teachers, proven techniques, and a course for dialogue between public education stakeholders, no such obligations are mandated for U.S. private schools.

Table 1

Special Education Categories Recognized by IDEA (2004)

1. Autism	8. Orthopedic Impairment
2. Deaf-Blindness	9. Other Health Impaired
3. Deafness	10. Specific Learning Disability
4. Emotional Disability	11. Speech or Language Impairment
5. Hearing Impairment	12. Traumatic Brain Injury
6. Intellectual Disability	13. Visual Impairment
7. Multiple Disabilities	

Note. Adapted from *The General Educator's Guide to Special Education,* by J. L. Maanum, 2009, Corwin Press. Copyright 2009 by Corwin Press.

Private schools (including Catholic schools) are not covered under IDEA (2004). If a public school places a child with an IEP in a private special education school as a part of the IEP, then the public school remains responsible for ensuring that the private school implements the IEP. According to Wrightslaw (2010):

> Children who attend public schools are entitled to a free appropriate education and an IEP, and they receive funding from the federal government. Private schools do *not*

> receive this funding and are not required to provide a free appropriate education or an IEP. They are not required to provide special education services to children with disabilities. (Wrightslaw, 2010, para. 2)

Depending upon the state or school district, "public schools may still have responsibilities for children with disabilities who are enrolled in private schools" (Wrightslaw, 2010, para. 4). This seems to clearly defend the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (2020) administrative handbook's policy, "While schools do not discriminate against students with special needs, a full range of services may not always be available to them" (para. 3). Though Catholic high schools in Los Angeles may be following the letter of secular law, are they following the law according to the Church and Gospel, as laid out in CST?

Inclusion Practices in Catholic High Schools

Catholic schools have served U.S. students since the 18th century. The number of Catholic schools in the United States increased dramatically and proportionately with the arrival of millions of Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants in the 19th century. Catholic schools served their communities of children with learning disabilities as they could, with what resources they could manage. Studies in the late 1800's and early 1900's bolstered the understanding that students with special needs needed new, additional educational strategies, different from mainstream students. In 1952, St. Coletta School for Retarded Boys opened in the Archdiocese of Chicago with the specific intention of serving students (boys) with special needs (Lamb, 1952). Today, while some Catholic high schools attempt to serve students with severe special needs, the majority serve students with only high-incidence, low-severity learning disabilities (Bello, 2006).

According to the U.S. Department of Education Report, *The Condition of Education, 2013*, approximately 13% of students in the United States required special education services (Aud et al., 2013). However, the same report indicated that only about 1% of students with special needs are enrolled in private schools (Aud et al., 2013). This includes all private schools including Catholic schools and private schools specifically designed to cater to the special-needs population. It is clear that Catholic schools are meeting the needs of far fewer special needs students than the public-school system. Is this due solely to the cost of tuition? Are the services offered to students with learning disabilities in Catholic schools inferior to public schools?

Accommodations and Modifications

The existing research indicates, as a general rule, Catholic schools do not offer a large range of services for students diagnosed with special needs (Carlson, 2014). One exception would be students who are on the autism spectrum, but whose symptoms appear mild. The IDEA (2004) defined autism as a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism include engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental changes or changes in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (IDEA, 2004, sec 300.8(c) (1) (i) para. 5). Mild social interaction disabilities, resistance to environmental change, and unusual responses to environmental change are easier to accommodate for Catholic schools in general than several of the more severe conditions found in Table 1.

Generally, Catholic schools place their special needs students into regular classrooms (mainstreaming). Mainstreaming denotes that students with special needs are included in the

general classroom if they can meet regular student expectations without requiring a great deal of special needs specific resources or assistance (Hansen & Boody, 1998). This means that as long as special needs students can sit in a regular class, cooperate with instructions, spend extra time studying, and ask appropriate questions, they might succeed in a Catholic school. Their success also requires teachers who can work with different learning modalities, create IEPs, demonstrate patience and flexibility with special needs students, and provide a comfortable and safe learning environment (Hansen & Boody, 1998). This version of special needs accommodation in Catholic high schools runs parallel with my experience. There is simply no further accommodation available to students who would require much more help, thus limiting which special needs students can be accepted by the school. Having to make do with limited resources forces most Catholic high schools to deny admission to students whose needs go beyond mainstreaming, thus denying them inclusion in the Catholic school community.

Hansen and Boody's (1998) research in the inclusive, mainstream classroom outlined the ingredients necessary for successful learning. That is not to say that these will guarantee special needs student success, but rather without these ingredients, learning will not be hindered. First, students must feel active, interested, and willing to participate in class activities. They must also be willing to do additional work on their own. Feelings of acceptance and perceptions of friendship among their non-special-needs peers are also important. They must also feel that they are receiving (or that they are able to receive) help from their classmates and from their teachers. While strong competition among students for grades might help if positively channeled, staying on task, clear rules, and clear expectations bolster the ability of special needs students to succeed.

One of the most important findings of the study was that special needs students and regular students perceived their classroom in an equally positive way (Hansen & Boody, 1998).

Catholic High Schools Practicing Inclusion

A case study by Powell (2004) found a Catholic high school in Virginia that went beyond the generalizations mentioned above and actively seeks to include students with special needs in their school population. Paul VI High School in Fairfax, Virginia offered a program called "Options" that sought to serve the needs of learning-disabled students. The school employed a certified special educator with experience teaching special needs students to run the program. An advisory council made up of members with experience in one or more areas of education met twice yearly to offer guidance. A parents advisory committee was established to assist with public relations and to coordinate fundraising, sports, and social activities. Non-special needs students were recruited to become peer mentors. The peer mentors received training on how to help special needs students get to the right class, take notes, exhibit proper public behavior, and generally enter into the social life of the school (Powell, 2004).

By 2003, the school had identified 216 out of 1,140 students with disabilities. The largest number of whom were enrolled in regular, college preparatory classes. Those who demonstrated the ability and work ethic to excel in a particular subject were given the option to participate in honors or AP courses (Powell, 2004). Students who struggled were allowed to participate in general level classes of the core subjects. These classes had a lower student to teacher ratio and emphasized fundamentals. The school had a Spanish language teacher with expertise in Spanish and experience teaching students with special needs. This allowed lower performing special needs students to meet the school's general two-year foreign language graduation requirement.

Another attribute of the school's success in accommodating the needs of learning-disabled students is the Academic Support Program (ASP). The ASP provided study halls, tutoring, homework assistance, and organizational training. The program also communicated directly with regular teachers and maintained communication between parents and subject teachers (Powell, 2004).

Another example of a Catholic high school that offered a higher degree of accommodation for students with disabilities was Chaminade Julienne Catholic High School (CJHS) in Dayton, Ohio. Through the school's Cuvilly program, students with disabilities were offered a comprehensive program of academic and social programs with an emphasis on preparing the students for post-secondary education. All potential participants were "evaluated on the level of services needed by the Cuvilly team, which is made up of the Director of Cuvilly, an intervention specialist, guidance counselors, teachers and parents" (Chaminade Julienne Catholic High School [CJHS], 2020). Students with disabilities were allowed to take general, college preparatory, and/or honors and AP classes. They were offered modifications to their academic program, adaptations for classes, and instructional support.

The school encouraged students with disabilities to become socially active, offering "a unique club called Cuvilly Community Club (CCC). This club is designed to have students plan activities in a safe environment. We have game night, movie night, an ice cream social, service projects, and bowling" (CJHS, 2020). Friends and parents were welcome to attend these events, helping to foster a positive social experience. CJHS also provided support of families exploring post-secondary options for their children. In order to prepare students with disabilities for life after high school, the program conducted "career interest surveys and works with students so

when they are ready to continue their education beyond CJ, they are prepared" (CJHS, 2020). Grading options were offered to students with disabilities. They were offered traditional grades for those needing minor adjustments and a pass/fail option for those who needed major adjustments to their educational program.

Cathedral Catholic High School (CCHS) in San Diego, California, was another Catholic high school offering a more in-depth program for students with disabilities. The school "is committed to creating a supportive academic learning environment for all our students" (Cathedral Catholic High School [CCHS], 2020). The school offered three tiers of assistance for its students with disabilities. The first option was a learning center, where students identified with minor learning disabilities, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or a reading disorder, could receive accommodations including extended time for test taking or spend a class period for extra support. This level of accommodation mirrored the basic level of care offered by many Catholic high schools, as discussed by DiFiore (2006):

> [Thirty-six percent] of the high schools reported having a teacher on staff with a degree in special education. These teachers provided a range of services for students including one-on-one tutorial assistance, consultation with teachers to develop accommodations, counseling services, and direct classroom instruction. Accommodations ranged from changes in testing and assessment to varying methods of instruction and alternative homework assignments. (p. 458)

Cathedral Catholic's accommodation of students with special needs was broadened through their Options and Academy programs. In the Academy program, a maximum of 10 students per grade learned from "one general education teacher per subject with the assistance of

a full-time special education teacher in specific subjects including: English, Math, Science and Social Studies" (CCHS, 2020, para. 5). The program offered "[s]tructured, specialized learning environment for diploma-bound students who desire a Catholic education" (CCHS, 2020, para. 4). The goals of this program directly aligned with CST's mandate to recognize "[t]he right of all to participate in family, community and social/political/religious life in order to reach the full flourishing of their humanity" (Carlson, 2014, p. 64).

The third service provided by Cathedral Catholic was the Options program. The Options program provided individualized curriculum design and an inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities. Students in this program received help from peer mentors who facilitated inclusion in typical CCHS classes, and from a special education case manager. The goal of the program was to:

> [Provide students with disabilities] an opportunity to become a part of the Cathedral Catholic community. Students enrolled in the Options Program will become as fully integrated as possible into the total life of the school community through participation in general education classes and campus activities. (CCHS, 2020, para. 3)

Students who successfully completed the four-year program did not receive a high school diploma. Rather, "students receive a certificate of achievement representing completion of a 4-year modified program" (CCHS, 2020, para. 3).

The depth of the programs at Paul VI, CJHS, and CCHS went above and beyond that generally found among Catholic high schools in the United States. Moreau et al. (2006) discussed the realities facing most Catholic high schools. The financial realities of teaching students with special needs was a major barrier to building effective programs. Those that made

any attempt to accommodate special needs students used mainstreaming, resource pullout, and special separate classrooms or schools (Moreau et al., 2006). The most economically feasible was mainstreaming. This can be daunting and difficult to many Catholic high school teachers, most of whom have had very little, if any, training specific to teaching special needs students. In the case of poor student behavior, teacher reactions have placed blame on self, parents, students, or a combination of all three. Many teachers also experienced a feeling of professional inadequacy. Moreau et al. (2006) felt a great part of the answer lies in greater funding and better teacher preparation.

These findings agree, in part, with the conclusions Powell (2004) in her experience with Paul VI High School. She found that the school's successful program was due to several factors. There has to have been an institutional commitment to include students with disabilities in a Catholic school. This was the base upon which every following success rests. Success also depended upon the willingness of a committed institution to listen to the concerns and ideas of parents and students. More invested parents and students became parents and students that were more committed. Catholic schools who wish to accommodate students with special needs needed to have the willingness of the school administration and the faculty to create and support an academic program, which serves students with widely varying abilities. There must also have been careful implementation of any special-needs programs. Finally, it helped if a school had a compelling story of students with learning disabilities to tell potential donors (Powell, 2004). In the case of most U.S. Catholic high schools, there has not been enough funding raised by tuition to support the expenses of the school; money must be raised from outside sources. This has been even more important to any school considering offering extended infrastructure to support

special needs students. Unfortunately, it appears that most Catholic high schools in the United States have been missing one or more of these elements.

Perceptions and Attitudes of Educators of Students with Disabilities

It must be remembered that this study was focused on educators at a Catholic school. Thus far, the literature has demonstrated that there are many clear options for students with disabilities in public schools. Public schools have the funding, resources, and the legal mandate to accommodate students with special needs. Yet, Catholic school educators must try to help those students they do have, while being on unequal footing with public schools. To understand what motivates them to do what they can with what they have, I believe it is important to mention some of the reasons why Catholic school educators choose to teach in Catholic schools. Many of the reasons given can be incorporated into CST.

The primary reason given when asked why lay teachers (not members of a religious order or society) choose to teach in Catholic high schools was the educational environment (Benson & Guerra, 1985). Community, as part of an educational environment, is described in terms of a sense of belonging, shared goals, collegiality, and order and discipline (Purkey & Smith, 1983). In Lacey's study (2000), mutual respect and shared professionalism with their peers were cited as important factors in their decision to remain in their current position (Lacey, 2000). While it is true that these factors may exist in any public or private institution, the decision to choose to organize, run, and maintain the organization along the lines of a common thread (in this case, Catholicism) engenders an environment where those goals are familiar to members of the church (Lacey, 2000). Anyone with a passing familiarity with Catholic schools, whether from popular culture or experience, has a general idea of what to expect at a Catholic school. Shared attitudes,

values, and beliefs of the members of a school's lay faculty enhance the development of the school community (Lacey, 2000). Catholic school students also notice this. Geanacopoulos (2001) discussed Rente, who was once a student at Holy Trinity School in Washington, D.C. and later on a faculty member as a reading-specialist teacher. Rente stated that "There is a true connection here," and "It is a real community" (as cited in Geanacopoulos, 2001, p. 26). The existence of the conditions listed above naturally make for a better workplace. Of more importance is how naturally all of these conditions fit into CST's call to family, community, and participation and the pursuit of the common good.

The preferential option for the poor and the dignity of work make up other elements why some educators choose to work in Catholic schools, rather than the public sector. Much of the work in this area is difficult to quantify, but clear to understand (in light of the mission of Catholic schools). Kicker and Loadman (1997) stated that the highest level of satisfaction for many teachers has been identified as the ability to make a difference in the lives of students. While many teachers who share this belief can be found at all levels and institutions, Catholic school teachers "see themselves as surrogate parents to those in their charge. The student-teacher relationship plays an important part in the teachers' responses as to why they were in a Catholic school" (Lacey, 2000, p. 8). Lacey (2000) found that "Catholic schools were perceived to provide an environment where teachers could function in an atmosphere where they, were empowered to teach, controlled what went on their classrooms, and decided how grades were awarded to their students" (p. 7). Geanacopoulos' (2001) research revealed that examples abound of teachers giving up their free time to help students prepare for a recital, tutoring students during lunch, and staying long after the bell to help their students.

These are admirable traits and conditions for students without disabilities in Catholic high schools, but do these conditions include students with disabilities? What are the prevailing attitudes and perceptions educators have toward students with disabilities? Do elements of CST fall by the wayside in the face of the challenges they present? The literature that is specific to Catholic schools is sparse, but we can glean some answers by looking at overall educational experiences found in the research, particularly in the general (non-special education) classroom.

Overall, teacher beliefs form a running theme in the literature regarding perceptions of a teacher's own ability to accommodate students with disabilities. According to De Boer et al. (2011), teachers have reported lower expectations of their students and reduced efficacy regarding instructing students with disabilities. Poor perceptions of self-efficacy lead to anxiety, affecting teacher attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities (De Boer et al., 2011). Kiely (2011) discussed three dimensions of teacher belief: beliefs about self, beliefs about subject, and beliefs about students with disabilities. These included beliefs about their roles and responsibilities,

> in following areas or subdimensions: instructional roles, their responsibility to adhere to policy, responsibility for student success, responsibility for the whole child, their role in the construction or transmission of knowledge, and to what extent they would persevere with students with disabilities. (Kiely, 2011, p. 198)

The importance of these beliefs becomes more enlightening when weighed against Stidham-Smith's (2013) finding that teachers who believed that they had support for inclusion in their schools had more positive beliefs about inclusion. It is important for administration to share these beliefs and to support their teachers, and that

> a willingness to teach students with disabilities without the belief that these students should be there and can achieve, may have a significant bearing on the success of these students, and may also adversely affect the attitudes of regular education students toward special education students. (Stidham-Smith, 2013, p. 148)

Principals' involvement is instrumental in ensuring success or failure in working toward an inclusive learning environment (Lynch, 2012). If the administration does not believe the school should accept students with disabilities, the battle may already be lost.

Teachers' beliefs about students with disabilities included beliefs about ways students with disabilities struggled, the needs of students with disabilities, and the nature of ability and disability (Kiely, 2011). Many teachers reported feeling underqualified to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities (Kiely, 2011). In a mixed-method study, Fisher's (2013) qualitative results revealed that "educators do not believe they are prepared to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom" (p. 3). Respondents indicated the need for more special education classes during the teacher preparation experience, including more practical hands-on experiences. Educators experience anxiety implementing IEPs and ensuring grade level curriculum while accounting for individualized needs (McLaughlin, 2010).

Respondents also expressed the need for more collaboration with special education personnel and assistance with resources, materials, and making modifications and accommodations in the classroom. Her research also found that general education teachers do not believe they are well prepared to teach children/students with specific special education needs. Participants in her study indicated a need for more special education courses and more practical experiences teaching students with disabilities (Fisher, 2013). Rust and Sinelnikov (2010)

reported that one teacher's lack of preparation and training with students with disabilities was made manifest when he asked a group of students with disabilities (who were illiterate) to read a set of rules that was posted on the wall.

If the norm is lack of training, which calls for more development, greater cooperation with the special education coordinator, and expanded learning resources and material, then what are Catholic high schools who do not have these resources to do? Can their dedication and belief in themselves, their subject, and their students carry them over their hurdles? Is there enough support from administration to enable the school to accommodate students with special needs? Can the call of CST make up for deficiencies in human and physical capital? This study examined these issues at one particular Catholic high school and to glean insight into their degree of success in accommodating students with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework upon which this study was constructed included CST and the ethic of care. CST emphasizes the tenets of the Catholic church that relate to social justice. By following Christ's example, followers care for neighbors, including those who are marginalized. Ethic of care instructs those in search of entering into a caring relationship, offering them a construct to learn and a path to follow. These two theories, taken together, lead caregivers into more meaningful caring relationships. This section describes these theories in the context of helping students with disabilities receive better and more holistic care.

CST

CST is best explained as the goal of achieving a right ordering society (matters of human dignity and the common good) in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church

(Massaro, 2016). CST mandates that Catholics follow every possible path to social justice as laid out by the hierarchy and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Whether Catholic high schools choose to vigorously pursue a program of education and accommodation for students with special needs rests upon the social justice principles of humanization and praxis. Humanization in Freire's (1970) context is the affirmation of men and women as persons. It is giving voice to the downtrodden, the overcoming of alienation, and the liberation of the oppressed. The context and the message can easily be transferred to marginalized and oppressed minorities around the world (including in the United States). Anyone whose voice is not heard, who is considered less than others, different from the hegemonic rule, is dehumanized. In this context, it is a short leap to the dehumanization of students with learning disabilities and special needs. Freire's (1970) message of liberation from any form of oppression in education is particularly poignant considering the call of Catholic social justice, whose mandate includes a commitment to love each person (made in the image and likeness of God), at each stage of life, according to her/his human dignity (USCCB, 2005).

Carlson's (2014) reading of Thomas Aquinas and CST found a clear moral mission to include children with special needs in Catholic education. She asked, "If the Church is called, by the principles of CST, to follow the radically inclusive teachings of Jesus, and does not, largely on the claim that there is not enough money, can that failure to include all be justified?" (Carlson, 2014, p. 67). The first two precepts of CST include loving each person and the right to participate fully in the community. According to Carlson (2014), Aquinas' writings on love of God and other fulfilled those prerequisites. The next two precepts oblige Catholics to ensure basic human rights and a preferential option for the poor. Aquinas' writings on this are clear:

those who have been given an overabundance of wealth must share the excess for the sustenance of the poor. The final three themes of CST include the right to be treated with dignity, a commitment to stand for justice, and the stewardship of all of God's creation. Carlson (2014) contended that Aquinas' message to give to each what is needed to live decently and to flourish addresses the last three themes and extends logically to students with special needs. This logical extension parallels an extension of Freire's (1970) call for an end to oppression in education in any form to include students with special needs.

Having addressed the call and command for Catholic schools to humanize the learning disabled, Carlson (2014) extended the discussion to praxis. Unless social justice themes can be put into practice, they cannot be realized and will remain hollow, vacuous phrases and slogans. Understanding that inclusion does not have to be an immediate, all or nothing prospect, Carlson (2014) outlined five methods of accommodating special needs students in Catholic schools. They include consultant models in which Catholic schools would take advantage of consultant services offered to teachers in private schools, collaboration models in which Catholic schools would band together to offer services of one type at each school, teacher's aide/tutor models that use teacher's aides or tutors trained to work individually with children diagnosed with special needs, resource room models that follow the public school resource room model of hiring licensed special educators, and a retraining model based upon retraining staff to be radically inclusive through methods such as universal design (Carlson, 2014). Carlson's (2014) guidelines formed a clear call demarginalize the learning disabled.

Adding to the call for social justice praxis, Malewitz and Pacheco (2016) conducted a lesson at a Catholic, parochial high school using brain-based learning theory (BBL) and systems

theory. Brain based learning suggested that learning takes place when students are able to confront challenging concepts in a threat free environment and when learning activates both conscious and unconscious processes and perceptions (Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016). Systems theory identifies a system as a set of things interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. In order to affect change in a system, leverage points need to be identified (Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016).

Incorporating these theories within a social justice framework, the lesson was taught over the course of 1 week. It took place in a classroom, used multiple methods of instruction (including film, iPads, and audio), and used discussion questions designed to stimulate systems theory thought. The lesson was designed to engender empathy for others. Concentrating on dialogue and active learning, rather than focusing on assessment, students engaged in dialogue that led to a greater sense of understanding and empathy of both African American and Caucasian students in the classroom. The lessons of social justice in the context of race could be just as easily used to engender understanding of and empathy for students with learning disabilities in a mainstream classroom (Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016).

In light of McKenna's (2013) interpretation, three specific elements of CST stood out as particularly appropriate to this study: the option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation. CST can be used to lay the groundwork for obligations mandated by the Catholic Church upon believers and direct and indirect extensions of the Church (in this case, Catholic high schools).

Ethic of Care

Ethic of care is a theory grounded in the concept of caring as reciprocal relationship of the caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 2013). It eschews the traditional academic questions of purity of purpose (logic) and the practical reasons for care (insofar as there has to be a reason for care). If CST provides a religious purpose and reasons for providing care to disabled students, the ethic of care paradigm presents us with guidelines toward the praxis of care. The major elements that characterize the caring are engrossment and motivational displacement (Noddings, 2005a).

According to Noddings (2005a), engrossment refers to the caring's receptivity to the cared-for. Full receptivity, in turn, conveys an understanding that the caring is truly attuned to the needs and feelings of the cared-for. The carer listens attentively to the needs of the cared for, responding in a way that the cared-for receives and recognizes. This encounter can be brief or longer lasting, but engrossment is essential for true caring. The next element is motivational displacement. In addition to listening to and empathizing with the cared for, the caring must turn all of her attention away from herself and onto the cared-for. Their concerns become the caring's concerns. Whatever was motivating the caring before this encounter (e.g., bills, work, family) are pushed aside completely in this moment for the benefit of the cared-for. Noddings asserted, "We [the caring] are seized by the needs of others" (Noddings, 2005a, p. 16).

The three major elements that characterize the consciousness of the who is *cared-for* are reception, recognition, and response (Noddings, 2005a). Although the caring's motivations may appear altruistic, there is a natural reciprocity expected in the ethic of care. A mother will naturally care for her infant child without expectation of reward, but will smile, laugh, and be

fulfilled when the baby coos and giggles. This reciprocity holds true in education when teachers (caring) experience a debilitating drain of energy when their students (cared-for) do not respond. One way of developing a response from students is to inculcate in them an obligation to enter relationships as caregivers themselves.

> When we discuss teaching and learner relationships in depth, we will see that teachers not only have to crate caring relations in which they are the caregivers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care. (Noddings, 2005a, p. 18)

If Catholic schoolteachers and administrators know they must engage students with disabilities, ethic of care demonstrates the mindset with which they should approach that engagement. Tremendous flexibility is necessary on the part of teachers when engaging and accommodating the needs of students with disabilities. The idea of what constitutes an ideal education must be "replaced with a multiplicity of models designed to accommodate multiple capacities and interests" (Noddings, 2005a, p. 173). A socially just education is not a one-size-fits-all education. Of particular value to this study have been those elements of ethic of care that discuss the caring, the cared-for, and engagement in moral education.

Summary

Catholic high schools have a religious mandate to serve members of their communities, including the poor and vulnerable USCCB (2005). Students with disabilities certainly fall into this category. Despite this call, many Catholic high schools fail to fully answer this call (Durow, 2007; Scanlan, 2009). Three significant pieces of legislation including Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, the ADA of 1990, and the IDEA of 2004 provide comprehensive

guidelines which must be strictly adhered to by public schools (Sack-Min, 2007). Many private religious schools (including Catholic high schools) have not had to follow these guidelines if they accept federal funding. If they do accept any federal funds, they have still been able to skirt many of the guidelines that would place an undue financial or logistical burden upon the school. Although there are examples of Catholic schools that have attempted to provide comprehensive services to students with disabilities, many have limited their accommodations to fewer students with disabilities, providing services that can be accomplished without the full gamut of special education resources and practices (Bicehouse & Faieta , 2017; Hansen & Boody, 1998; Powell, 2004; Russo et al., 2009; Scanlan, 2009).

Despite obstacles such as lack of resources, Catholic high school teachers generally have cared about the instruction they provide to all of their students, including those students with disabilities under their care (Geanacopoulos, 2001; Kicker & Loadman, 1997; Lacey, 2000). Catholic school teachers have been less concerned about having to educate students with disabilities than they have been worried about their ability to do so. Many felt inadequate to the task and underqualified to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities, lacking proper training and experience to teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Fisher, 2013; Kiely, 2011; Stidham-Smith, 2013).

I chose this study to add the voices of teachers at one Catholic high school in California to the narrative of accommodating students with special needs in Catholic high schools. I learned their perceptions of students with special needs and the degree to which they are prepared to accommodate students with special needs. I also examined their current practices educating students with special needs and the degree to which they are following special education

guidelines spelled out in the legal context. Finally, I explored the degree to which CST and ethic of care play part of the reason why these teachers chose to teach at a Catholic school and choose to embrace their students with special needs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss features of interviewing participants as a research methodology and explain why this methodology was appropriate for a study of this nature. I elaborate upon the contextual setting of the research, while describing the processes of identifying, selecting, and contacting the participants. I also lay out the steps of this study's methodology, providing an outline of the study and descriptions of the interview protocol. Finally, I present the strategies for data collection and data analysis for this study.

Interviewing as a Methodology

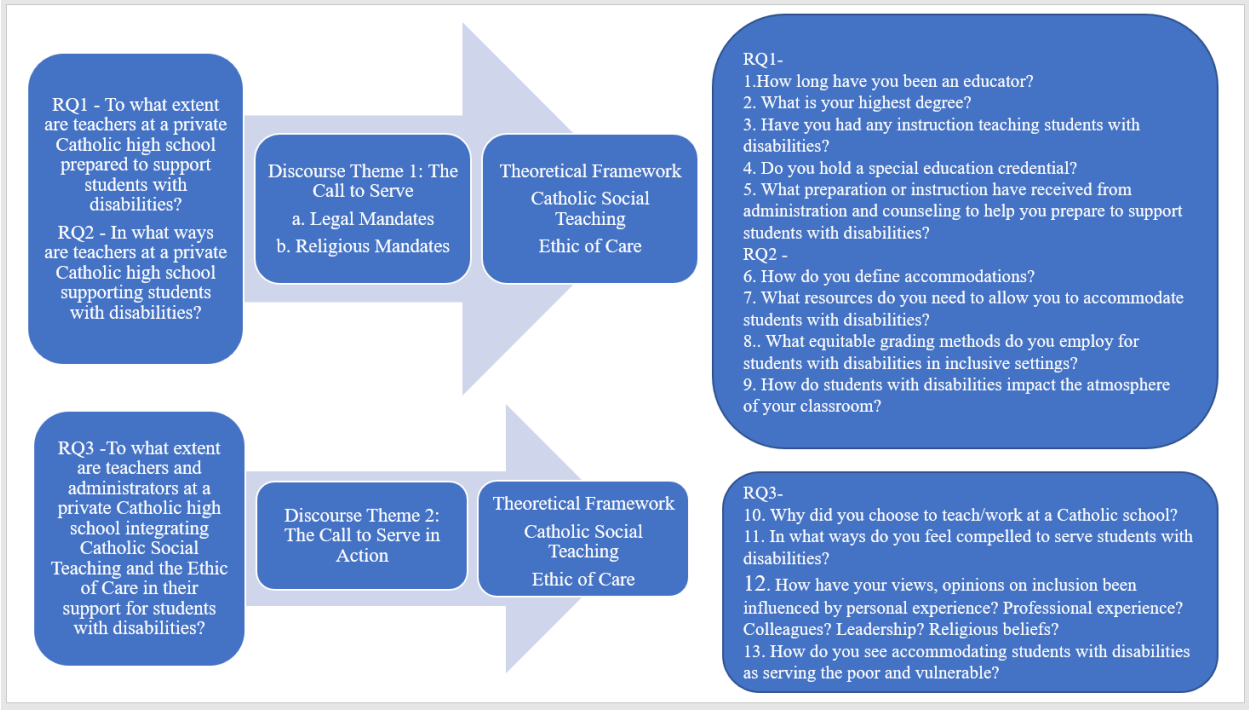
Historical background is fundamental to understanding the research, however it may provide an incomplete picture. Qualitative case studies allow the researcher to add artifacts, direct observations, and interviews to the broader story of the study. Interviews are an essential source of case-study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or actions (Yin, 2018).

Figure 4 demonstrates the alignment of the research questions to the interview questions, filtered through the discourse themes of the literature review and the theoretical framework. The first research question asks about the degree to which educators feel called to serve the needs of students with disabilities. The review of the literature yields two major themes: the call to serve from a personal spiritual source and the call to serve from a legal framework. The mandates of CST clearly connect to the spiritual call to serve (USCCB, 2005). Those who answer the call through their faith and the teachings of the church fall into the religious framework of the call to serve. The ethic of care is not necessarily divorced from the spiritual, but can be informed by it

nuanced by themes of caring in CST. For example, the call to serve the poor and vulnerable forms only a part of CST but is integral to the ethic of care's call to accept responsibility (Noddings, 2005a). The legal framework, by which the states and the federal government mandates accommodation of students with disabilities, is not based upon any religious calling (Lafee, 2011). Much of the content of the legal framework, such as responsibility, can be found in the ethic of care's obligation to connect care to pre-established societal and cultural norms and roles (Noddings, 2005a; Scanlan, 2009).

Figure 4

Alignment of Research Questions to Discourse Themes to Theoretical Framework to Interview Questions



The second research question asked about the ways educators answered the call to serve. How did they put their call into practice? The themes found in the literature demonstrated examples of practice currently engaged in by Catholic schools and investigated how participants

in the setting engage with their students with disabilities. CST has played a role in the formation of services provided to students with disabilities in Catholic schools across the nation. Elements of ethic of care were visible in those examples as well. The interview questions that tied in to the second research question offered insight into the third research question. This question addressed the extent to which the theoretical framework was put into action by exploring the ways that CST and ethic of care insinuated themselves into the methods of accommodation as practiced by the participants in the setting. Figure 4 offers a visual representation of the alignment of the research questions to the discourse themes to the theoretical framework to the interview questions.

I chose to use semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Although there was structure in the interview questions, it was important to this study that participants were encouraged to speak in their own way, telling their own stories in a manner that best expresses their experiences as authentically as possible. Part of this equation was to establish and maintain a conversational tone and atmosphere through flexibility and active listening (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Unlike surveys, semi-structured interviews can be adjusted and reordered to fit the participants' understanding and to allow them to complete their thoughts.

I decided to conduct two 1-hour interview sessions with each participant. This allowed me to focus my semi-structured interviews on each of the research questions. It also allowed follow up questions from the first interview and set the tone for the second. Several participants completed the interview process in one session, negating the need for a follow-up interview. All participants were encouraged to contact me if they wished to share more information or to expand upon their previous answers.

Both of the research questions addressed CST and ethic of care. However, the first fit best thematically in the ethic of care framework. This question addressed the practical aspects of the relationship between caring (teachers) and cared-for (students). The first research question asked the extent to which teachers and administrators at one coeducational suburban Catholic high school felt spiritually and professionally called to accommodate students with disabilities. It was important in these first interviews to set a tone that was friendly and comfortable so that participants felt at ease to tell their stories. This first session asked for basic information, such as a discussion of the interview format and protocols, the participants' self-selected pseudonyms and background information pertinent to their experiences. Then the interviews consisted of questions designed to address the spiritual and professional calls to accommodate students with disabilities. Examples of questions included: (a) Why did you choose to teach at a Catholic school? and (b) In what ways do you feel compelled to serve students with disabilities?

The second session began with a follow-up from the first. Participants had the opportunity to share parts of their story they may have left out or to clarify points they made in the first session. Then the sessions focused on my second research question: In what ways do teachers and administrators at this school put the call of CST and the obligations of social justice into a relationship of care for students with disabilities? Here, participants were asked how theory is put into practice at their institution. Discussion for this session included questions such as: (a) What steps do you take to enhance accommodation of your students with special needs? and (b) What resources do you need to foster inclusion of students with disabilities in your classroom?

Contextual Setting

The following section describes my choice of a Catholic high school setting. The choice of a Catholic high school was obvious considering the topic of this study. It was important for me to discuss some of my personal experiences teaching at a Catholic school and my questions regarding accommodating students with disabilities. Following this is a description of the specific high school that served as the setting of this study. This section then discusses the participants of the study, including criteria for seeking out, recruiting, and selecting individual educators. Also discussed are degrees of participant confidentiality and anonymity afforded study participants. Finally, I lay out elements of compensation for participants in this study.

Catholic High School Setting

It was important to me to study what Catholic high schools were doing to accommodate students with disabilities. I had been a Catholic high school teacher, so the information gleaned in this study was of particular relevance to me as it affects me, my relationship to my students, and my teaching on a personal level. The subject of students with disabilities in public schools has been well studied and research continues. My interest was specifically in Catholic schools. Without legal mandates, but with social and religious ones, what were Catholic schools doing to address the needs of students with disabilities? I wanted to know if my personal experience teaching students with disabilities at a Catholic high school was routine, even for the institution where I have been teaching, if not for other Catholic high schools. A review of the literature found several studies of students with disabilities in Catholic elementary schools, but fewer studies of those students in Catholic high schools. High school students with disabilities have

presented similar challenges as their elementary peers. However, there may be different and more effective methods of accommodation for teens with disabilities than younger students.

St. Dymphna School

In order to provide anonymity, the study used a pseudonym for the study site. St. Dymphna School was a private, independent, Catholic high school, serving families in the greater Los Angeles area. The school was small to medium-sized with an average of 450 students per school year, grades nine through 12. The number of students per grade level typically ranged between 90 to 130 students. In the classroom, the student to teacher ratio was 18:1. The site was co-educational with a population that was 51% female and 49% male. The school was on a block schedule. Classes met for 85 minutes on alternate days, allowing teachers greater time and flexibility to engage students directly; in theory, they should have been better able to address the needs of individual students who need more attention.

One possible indicator of a learning disability has been poor academic performance. Teachers at St. Dymphna's kept track of poor performing students in their classes. They also encouraged students to check in with them during tutorial period, to see if they have completed assignments and to assist them with best learning practices. Teachers also met with grade level counselors to discuss student performance. I chose the study site for several reasons including demographics, representative value, and convenience.

Participants

This study focused only on adults: faculty, staff, and administration at St. Dymphna School. My research questions centered upon what is being done by Catholic high schools to accommodate students with disabilities. I chose to focus on the adults responsible for caring for

the needs of those students and their experiences doing so. A list of participant demographic information appears in Chapter 4. Since this study did not include student participants, it did not require parental consent.

Recruitment of Participants

In order to obtain a clearer picture of practices at the study site, it was important to recruit participants from a broad spectrum of experiences. I recruited administrators who may have had a different outlook on the school's goals regarding students with special needs and who certainly had greater power to effect policy change. I also recruited teachers from different departments, bringing different perspectives into the study. For example, the classroom experience in a typical mathematics class may be dissimilar in many respects to that in an English course. Yet, teachers in both classrooms have been forced to engage students with disabilities.

Participants were given a copy of the Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to agree to participate in the study with an understanding of the time they were required to commit to it. They were each given a copy of the finalized interview questions (see Appendix B). The fact that I wished to draw from multiple departments combined with the fact that some teachers did not wish to participate meant that some teachers at St. Dymphna's were left out of this study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Before agreeing to participate in the study, faculty and staff were informed that their participation would remain confidential. I explained that all documentation, recordings, and transcriptions would be held securely (locked file cabinet for written documents and data encrypted storage for electronic files and recordings). I was the only one able to access all of

these sites. Additionally, participants were assigned pseudonyms to be used during the study. The intention was to publish this study after its conclusion.

Compensation for Participation

Time has been among the most valuable possessions of any educator. In recognition of the time given in the study, each participant received a small box of chocolate (approximate value $10.00). In addition, water, soft drinks, coffee, and snacks were available at the interview sessions.

Data Collection

It was imperative that I set out a clear map of the data collection process. This section includes a discussion of the methods of data collection chosen for this study. I lay out the data collection timeline and describe the importance of interviews as this study's primary method of data collection. I then discuss how the collected interview data was analyzed, organized, and managed, including steps I took to ensure the security of the data.

Data Collection Timeline

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I began the recruitment of participants. Data was collected from mid-September through the end of January 2020. The data needed to be collected early enough to allow participants to avoid the rush to prepare for the conclusion of the first semester and accompanying final exams.

Method of Data Collection

The method for data collection was to conduct semi-structured individual interviews. According to Gay et al. (2012), there were three general choices for collecting interview data: taking notes during the interview, audio or video recording during the interview, or writing notes

after the interview (Gay et al., 2012). I digitally recorded audio of the interviews. This kept distractions to a minimum and gave me a full account of what was said during each interview. After the completion of the interview process, interviews were transcribed by an electronic transcription application.

Data Analysis

The goal of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the practices and needs of teachers and their attempts to accommodate students with disabilities at a Catholic high school. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) identified the data analysis portion of qualitative research as the process of bringing meaning, order, and structure to the masses of data collected. Their four-step process of analyzing the data includes: identifying big ideas, coding the data, reporting the findings, and interpreting the findings. In looking for themes in the experiences of Catholic educators, I took the collected data and, using the context of CST and ethic of care, transformed data into knowledge (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Based upon the theoretical framework, the themes and patterns of knowledge I gleaned from this research aligned with elements of holistic and integral caring (ethic of care) and with elements of religiously mandated caring (CST). The data did not seek to confirm a pre-supposed theory, but rather hoped to shed light on the practices and experiences of educators at one school and the degree to which those practices engender social justice.

Organization of Data Collected

It is only when the data are well organized, that analysis can begin in earnest (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In order to ensure that my data were well organized, I followed several steps, as laid out by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). First, it was paramount to transcribe the interviews as

soon as possible making sure to instruct the transcriber to listen for pauses, laughter, and other, nonverbal nuances which could be noted within parenthesis when they occurred. All data were checked to be complete and legible. I organized the data according to type (e.g., observer's notes, memos, transcriptions) and marked it so that each type could be identified quickly and correctly. As stated above, any copies made were stored in a secure filing cabinet and electronic data were stored during the writing process on my personal computer and backed up on a password protected USB drive.

Data Management

I planned to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each of the participants for a total of the 16 semi-structured interviews. These interviews were collected, recorded, and professionally transcribed. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, the participants were given pseudonyms. Audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on my personal computer (password protected) and on a USB drive (also password protected) until the completion of this study. Transcripts were printed and placed in a binder. It was helpful for me to be able to access the data in printed form so that I might better manage and make sense of it. Experience has taught me that I am better able to access, find, move, and connect data that is right in front of me, rather than on a computer or tablet. At the conclusion of the study, all research data was transferred to password-protected USB drives and removed permanently from my personal computer. The information from the USB drives (each containing identical information) was copied; I kept one copy in a locked file cabinet to which only I have the key and the dissertation chair received a second copy to be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only she has access. The results from the study may be published in journals or presented at conferences.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

Trustworthy research is research that is good and convincing (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The terminology for trustworthiness in a qualitative study such as this differed from those found in quantitative studies. In quantitative research, the terms used to ensure the reader of rigor in the study were validity and reliability. There are many critics who posit that qualitative studies cannot be validated in the same manner as quantitative research and who are "reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research" (Shenton, 2004). Their argument is true to some extent. Qualitative studies do not often have the same clear, observable data and statistical analysis found in quantitative research. However, it would be a mistake to say that trustworthiness cannot be found in qualitative research. Rather, the two are different approaches to research and necessitate different approaches to trustworthiness. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria that he believed should be considered by qualitative researchers when seeking trustworthiness in their studies. Instead of internal validity, he proposed credibility. In preference to external validity (generalizability), he suggested transferability. Dependability was his preference over reliability, and confirmability (according to Guba) should replace objectivity.

Qualitative research must use research strategies that serve to reinforce the strength and quality of the research. Again, qualitative research and quantitative research are different and require different methods to achieve this. A qualitative researcher can engage in several methods to ensure good and convincing research at each stage in the process, including (among others) member checks and peer debriefing for credibility, an audit trail for dependability, triangulation for confirmability, and thick description for transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). These strategies employed clearly and consistently, can help bolster the strength of qualitative research

and enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. A description of each of the criteria employed to ensure trustworthiness in this study appears below (see Table 2).

Table 2
Criteria for Trustworthiness Used in the Study

Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
Clarification of Biases	Purposive Sampling	Audit Trail	Critical Reflection
Sustained Engagement in the Field	Collect and Develop		Audit Trail
Triangulation Peer Debriefing			

Credibility

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "credibility addresses the researcher's ability to take into account and explain all the complexities that present themselves in a study and to address the patterns, themes, and issues that might not easily be understood" (p. 202). In an effort to establish credibility, I clarified any biases I may have, engaged in repeated and substantial engagement in the field, employed triangulation, and used peer-debriefing to enhance the accuracy of my account.

Clarification of Biases

I have been a teacher at St. Dymphna's School. I am also an alumnus. As such, I clearly have had a perspective that could appear biased and subjective. In order to maintain credibility, it was important that, as a researcher, I maintained objectivity throughout the study. Through self-reflection, I maintained an open and honest attitude that I hope will resonate well with readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Recording my thoughts during the study helped me to monitor my subjective perspectives and biases.

Sustained Engagement in the Field

As a teacher at St. Dymphna's School, I was, in a sense, imbedded in my research. With consistent checks for objectivity, my prolonged involvement facilitated a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Prolonged involvement allowed me to convey better detail about the school and the participants, thus lending credibility to the study.

Triangulation

In order to corroborate the evidence I obtained during the study, it was important for me to triangulate the data. Shenton (2004) suggested data collection including interviews and observation. My study included interviews as the major component of my research, in addition to the collection of data from the site. This data included demographic statistics and policy, which could be compared against the data from the interviews.

Peer Debriefing

I met and communicated regularly with my doctoral chair during the study. I recorded thoughts, ideas, and questions I had during the study in order to inform my research and to offer better insight into my progress so that my doctoral chair could better guide my study. Shenton (2004) stated that frequent debriefing with a superior (in this case my doctoral committee) can widen my vision as others share their experiences. Meetings with my doctoral committee also served to point out flaws in my research, discuss alternative approaches, and help me recognize my biases. The committee was an excellent sounding board for me to test my developing interpretations. Additionally, my doctoral chair's experience and expertise added credibility to the study.

Transferability

For lack of a perfect apples to apples comparison, transferability in qualitative research can best be paralleled with external validity in quantitative research. It is the extent to which the study's results can be related to the broader population (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). My study involved only one school in one state. One method to broaden applicability of the study was purposeful sampling. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that purposeful sampling can provide readers with an idea of the participants, their experiences, and the context of a qualitative study, enabling them to form their own opinions about the authenticity of the research and the relevance to their own situations. As a qualitative researcher, I have not expected that the findings from this study would be generalizable to all other settings. However, it was likely that what I learned may be of some use to others. In terms of transferability, my goal was to make it possible for readers to decide for themselves whether or not, and to what degree, my findings are applicable in their own settings and institutions. Therefore, I provided what I hope is sufficient thick description of the phenomenon under investigation in order to, "allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations" (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

Purposive Sampling

Even though qualitative investigations typically involve the use of small samples, choice of sample size still is an important consideration because it determines the extent to which the researcher can make each of the four types of generalizations (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007a). It was important to avoid too large a sample of participants to prevent the collection of thick data, and too small a sample to achieve enough data. I used parallel sampling of two subgroups

(faculty and administration) in order to examine whether meanings of one case could be reciprocally translated. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007b) stated that comparing subgroups of cases, "prevents readers from incorrectly assuming that the researcher's findings are invariant across all subgroups inherent in their studies" (p. 244). Thus, the reader can obtain a better picture as to what elements of the study are most applicable (transferable) to their own situation.

Collect and Develop Thick Descriptions

Another aspect of enhancing the complexity of the research is to collect and develop thick descriptions. Thick descriptions are those that interpret the behavior within the context of the setting (Ponterotto, 2006). The key word here is context. Schwandt (2001) posited that thick description is not simply amassing a great quantity of detail. Rather, to offer thick description requires interpretation and contextualization of the nuances of the circumstances if the research, including meanings, intentions, and motivations characterizing particular episodes (Schwandt, 2001). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested this can be done through thoroughly describing the study's setting, research participants, and related experiences, thereby producing findings and interpretations that will allow readers to make meaning in context. To help me develop thick descriptions for this study, I used long quotes from the participants that bring forth meaning, intention, and experience, allowing the reader to contextualize the state of the participants and the interviewer.

Confirmability

Whereas dependability is concerned with ensuring the research process is clearly documented, confirmability concerns itself with establishing that the researcher's findings and interpretations are clearly from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Although scholars have

tended to conflate confirmability in qualitative research with objectivity in quantitative research, it is not a perfect comparison. Qualitative research has not claimed to be objective. Rather, qualitative researchers have striven to demonstrate that the findings of a study are the result of research, not the outcome of biases, preconceived notions, or subjectivity of the author (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The audit trail from dependability helped establish confirmability, as did ongoing critical reflection.

Critical Reflection

While I cannot claim to be free from bias and completely objective in my research, I can enhance confirmability by admitting my own predispositions. I did so through ongoing critically reflective commentary. It was my goal to make clear my beliefs which were behind decisions made and methods adopted. I also acknowledged the possible weaknesses of the techniques I chose to employ. In terms of the findings, "preliminary theories that ultimately were not borne out by the data should also be discussed" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). The assistance of my doctoral chair was of the utmost importance in this process, offering me observations and suggestions from the vantage point of someone standing outside of the process.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data over time; it is the degree to which one can adequately track all of the processes and procedures used by the researcher to collect and interpret data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The authors suggested creating an audit trail. The concept of an audit trail is taken from the world of finance. In that context, theoretically, an auditor who wishes to assess the accuracy of a company's financial records may

be satisfied if the data is consistent and can be adequately tracked. This metaphor transfers conveniently to dependability in qualitative research.

Audit Trail

To create an audit trail, the study recorded detailed and thorough explanations of how I collected and analyzed the data and maintain a clear record of field notes and transcripts. By creating and maintaining an audit trail, I hoped to assure the reader that my research process was clearly documented, logical, and traceable, thus helping to bolster the dependability of the study. I worked closely with and under the guidance of my doctoral chair during the research process to discuss procedures that would help ensure the integrity of the audit trail, and thus the dependability of the study.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 focused on the methods I planned to employ in my research. Interviews with those directly on the front lines of educating students with disabilities in a Catholic high school formed the bulk of the data. In it, I discussed the merit of interviews in qualitative research, namely giving voice to the participants and adding depth to their experiences, key features of interviewing as a research methodology. I laid out the research questions, outlined the setting of the research, and the process for selecting the participants. I provided a description of the study, including data collection, management, and interview format. Finally, I discussed the four criteria for trustworthiness and the steps I would take to maintain them. The study sought to hear the voices of educators in a Catholic high school discussing their experiences, needs, and outlook accommodating students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study investigated what one Catholic high school was doing to accommodate students with special needs. It also explored what motivated this school's educators to engage with students with disabilities. The research indicated that, although serving all members of the community is a precept of CST, full-spectrum education for students with disabilities in Catholic high schools is rare (Carlson, 2014; Durow, 2007; Hansen & Boody, 1998; Moreau et al., 2006). While schools such as Saint Paul VI High School, CJHS, and CCHS offer a wide spectrum of services for students with disabilities, they are the exceptions, rather than the rule (Schweinbeck, 2001). Although there are some exceptions, legal mandates including Section 504, the ADA (1990), and IDEA (2004) do not fully compel Catholic high schools to offer full accommodation of students with disabilities (Schweinbeck, 2001). The lack of a legal mandate combined with strained resources leaves most Catholic high schools without a full inclusion environment. This study looked at educators at one such high school, whose motivation to serve students with disabilities came not from legal mandates, professional preparation, or a specific goal to serve them, but from religious and personal reasons, including precepts of CST and empathetic caring. This information will add to the available research on the topics of educator preparation and accommodation of students with disabilities in Catholic high schools.

The method for data collection was a series of semi-structured individual interviews, consisting of 13 interview questions (see Table 3). I took notes during each interview and digitally recorded audio of the interviews giving me a full account of what was said during each interview.

Table 3

Interview Questions for the Study

1.	How long have you been an educator?
2.	What is your highest degree?
3.	Have you had any instruction teaching students with disabilities?
4.	Do you hold a special education credential?
5.	What preparation or instruction have received from administration and counseling to help you prepare to support students with disabilities?
6.	How do you define accommodations?
7.	What resources do you need to allow you to accommodate students with disabilities?
8.	What equitable grading methods do you employ for students with disabilities in inclusive settings?
9.	How do students with disabilities impact the atmosphere of your classroom?
10.	Why did you choose to teach/work at a Catholic school?
11.	In what ways do you feel compelled to serve students with disabilities?
12.	How have your views, opinions on inclusion been influenced by personal experience? Professional experience? Colleagues? Leadership? Religious beliefs?
13.	How do you see accommodating students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable?

After the completion of the interview process, interviews were transcribed by an electronic transcription application. The transcriptions were compared to my notes. Data were initially coded into three main categories that aligned with the research questions. This led to three main categories: preparation, practice, perception, and reflection. Each of these categories led to themes that tied to the research questions (see Table 4).

Table 4

Categories and Themes for Interview Questions and Responses

Questions	Focus	Categories	Themes
#1-2	Demographic data	Preparation	-
#3-5	Formal instruction	Preparation	Receiving little or no formal college preparation accommodating students with disabilities
	Professional development	Preparation	Receiving infrequent or vague professional development accommodating students with disabilities
#6-8	Teacher definitions of accommodation	Practice	Meeting the needs of the students
	Accommodation practices	Practice	Using mixed methods to accommodate their students with special needs
	Resources needed	Practice	Using multiple resources to accommodate students with disabilities
			Considering current resource deficiencies
	Equitable grading methods	Practice	Using a variety of grading methods for students with disabilities
#9	SD contributions to class	Perception	Appreciating positive contributions presented by students with disabilities in the classroom
	SD challenges to class	Perception	Acknowledging challenges presented by students with disabilities in the classroom
#10-13	Motivation	Reflection	Called to serve by personal and religious reasons.
	Accommodation as CST	Reflection	Seeing all students (including students with disabilities) as poor and vulnerable members of the community

Participants

Participants were recruited from a southern California Catholic high school, referred to in this study as St. Dymphna's School, where they served as teachers and administrators. Individual

letters of interest were sent to 15 educators who were currently employed by St. Dymphna's and who represented several different departments, teaching several different disciplines. Potential participants were contacted via St. Dymphna work email. Of the 15 invitations sent, 12 agreed to participate and three were unwilling or unable to participate. The educators who agreed to participate included eight full-time teachers, three administrators who taught at least one class, and one administrator who interacted with students on a daily basis but did not teach a class. The average years of experience in education was 19 (see Table 5).

Table 5

Participant Demographic Data

Name	Years of Teaching Experience	Primary Subject Taught
Olivia	19	Mathematics
Tony	12	Science
Skip	17	Social Studies
Ian	20	English
Sophia	30	Spanish
Ophelia	16	English
Nora	20	Social Studies
Cynthia	8	Science
Sylvia	15	Vice-Principal/Humanities
Sarah	25	Learning Specialist/Counseling
Matilda	23	Dean of Studies/Humanities
Pete	20	Principal/Theology

All participants were given an Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights (see Appendix A) and signed consent forms. They were also given the interview question ahead of time (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants. The interviews were conducted in locations agreed upon by participants and the researcher, all on campus, usually in their office or classroom. All interviews were conducted in person, in one sitting; one of the interviews had to be continued on a second day.

Category 1: Preparation

The theme of preparation focused on the degree of formal training educators received. The interviews asked for general education background, and the extent to which they had been trained to accommodate students with special needs. All 12 study participants held master's degrees; two of the participants were doctoral candidates at the time of the study. Another two of the participants held teaching credentials; none of the participants held a special education credential.

Theme 1: Receiving Little or no Formal College Preparation and Infrequent or Vague Professional Development Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Possession of a special education credential requires extensive instruction and preparation assessing and working to assist students with disabilities. None of the participants said they were in possession of a special education credential. Not holding a special education credential does not necessarily preclude a teacher from having received formal instruction accommodating students with disabilities. Six of the 12 participants responded that they had received formal instruction teaching students with disabilities as part of their graduate matriculation. The type and depth of instruction varied; below are quotes from the participants that illustrate their experiences.

The level of college study to tech students with disabilities usually amounted to one or two semester courses. The general consensus of the participants was that the courses proved insufficient to prepare them for all of the eventualities they might face. Ian offered an example:

> I've taken several classes, um, my last year in college, being able to identify some of the signs of students with disabilities and how to help cope with some of them, not completely, but just how to cope with them.

Sophia, who was from Latin America, took a course mandated by her government accommodating students with disabilities. She explained how this course taught some special education basics:

> We, when I was in my country, in college, we had a class. That was my first encounter with disabilities or how to teach kids with disabilities. We had a class called *Educational Orientation*. The professor (who was also a counselor) taught us about how to deal with different disabilities.

Pete also experienced a single course that offered minimal instruction. He explained,

> I would say it's minimal, but yes. I [instruction covered] differentiated instruction on how to support students with dyslexia for instance, or techniques for allowing students to do sort of non-traditional things in the classroom.

These experiences continue. Participants discussed regret that the courses were narrow in focus and scope. Sylvia felt she learned little that would help her, as an educator, actually engage with her students with disabilities. According the her:

> There was one class as part of the program that was probably state mandated and, unfortunately, I didn't get more exposure than that. It was sort of an isolated course. It seemed very focused on legal aspects of the process and it was . . . not very hands on in application. It was more so in the theoretical sense and also the legal sense of what the state mandates of us and how, and, and sort of setting us up for understanding the documentation process and the process that students will go through and families will go through. But in terms of my capacity as a teacher and how that would be approached in a classroom, I don't think that was even addressed.

Nora, who enjoyed her course, still found it theoretical in nature, focused more on the legalities of teaching students with disabilities, rather than practical, hands-on application. She said:

> Absolutely. I took one of the best classes ever; it was when I got introduced to students with special needs and inclusion and what's required by law and how important that is in education, whether you're a private school or a public school. There was so much to know according to the law, there was so much to know about what was going on with students. I also took a health course for my credential, which was connected to students with special needs.

Matilda's special education coursework involved direct observation and experience teaching students with disabilities. Her course was part of a learning-by-doing program in conjunction with a local public high school. She said:

> It was a standalone course and classroom with severely mentally handicapped students: down syndrome, autism, nonverbal [students]. I was working with them for a while and shadowing. And so I had observational instruction in that regard. Um, that was obviously very severe in terms of their handicaps and disabilities.

This course allowed her to see what was happening in public school classrooms but did not fully prepare her for what she would experience most often in her position at a private school.

According to these responses, participants who received formal college instruction on students with disabilities took their courses as part of an overarching matriculation process. The courses they took were limited to one or two for each participant. The focus of the courses they took varied from legal responsibilities and educational theory, but with limited praxis. There were cases of enthusiasm for the instruction received and regret for the topics that were not covered.

Theme 2: Receiving Infrequent or Vague Professional Development Accommodating Students with Disabilities

All of the participants are required by St. Dymphna's school to engage in various professional development courses during the academic year. Professional development includes any training received throughout the career of education support professionals. Professional development can include workshops, seminars, webinars, and other learning experiences that provide teachers opportunities to gain and improve the knowledge and skills important to their positions and job performance. Each of the participants in this study received some degree of professional development in the area of accommodating students with disabilities. Like those

who received formal classroom instruction, the breadth and depth of professional development varied from participant to participant.

For some of the participants, the professional development sessions they attended provided basic instruction offering accommodations to students with disabilities. According to Tony:

> We've had an in-service or two where a learning specialist has spoken to the faculty. [We learned] ways to provide notes or information to the students that's more accessible to them. Ways to format papers, testing, things that make it more accessible to everybody, mostly small strategies.

Ian echoed Tony's assessment but adds that there was very little he was not already familiar with and what was offered was general and theoretical. He said:

> I remember one session, but it was brief and we were given some tools, but they were some of the things I was already familiar with. I remember it was one of those instructional sessions where we were told how to help instruct students with executive functioning skills, disabilities. Most of our instructions and solutions came in forms of charts and worksheets. Um, there's very little hands-on.

Ophelia summed up her professional development experience by stating,

> The learning specialist provides meetings, advice, sometimes specific instruction regarding an individual student.

Some of the participants commented that at least some of the professional development sessions were led by presenters from outside of the school. Nora remembered a presentation by Foothill SELPA. Foothill SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area) was a service of St. Dymphna's local public-school district that ensures program availability for all children with disabilities. Part of SELPA's work included providing outreach to private schools within the school district, including fulfilling their individual student assessments as mandated by law. Nora remembered,

> We worked with the Foothill SELPA. That was an excellent resource. [It was] a lady from the school district, she's been in my classroom before, but to observe students.

Sylvia discussed a professional development program, called the STEP program, presented by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She discussed:

> It was created by Catholic schools and by the archdiocese to help Catholic school educators understand how to respond and meet students' needs. They take you through all of the forms and they give you student profiles, which that's to me is the most helpful, [to discuss] how we then meet those [student] needs or make those minor adjustments. It's not the best training and again, not very hands on, (other than the student profiles) to allow [educators] to understand how we can make those adjustments in our classroom every day.

Matilda also remembered professional development teaching students with special needs. She recalled,

> We've had different things. Even before we had a learning specialist here at St. Dymphna's, we had outside special ed. instructors and coordinators. Foothill SELPA did some training and workshops with us.

The responses regarding professional development attended by educators at St. Dymphna's reveal a mix of validation and frustration. Tony, Ophelia, and Ian commented on the valuable tools and techniques they could use to assist students with disabilities in their classroom. Nora and Matilda discussed an outside source with extensive experience accommodating students with disabilities. Ian and Nora talked about their frustration with the depth of their professional development. They discussed how their professional development sessions provided little hands-on instruction, how it was theoretical or simply observational. Cynthia's displeasure with her professional development was made manifest by her response,

> We've had some in-services where we've had people come and talk. But those don't even scratch the surface of what is needed.

Category 2: Practice

The research questions sought to explore the extent to which, and the methods employed by educators at St. Dymphna's to engage their students with disabilities. The interview questions that addressed this theme asked teachers how they defined accommodations and what current accommodation practices they used (within their definitions). Participants were asked to consider the resources they used and resources they lacked in order to accommodate students with disabilities. Teachers were further asked to discuss what equitable grading methods they used for their students with disabilities.

Several themes emerged from the discussion of current practice. Teachers discussed accommodation as meeting the needs of their students with disabilities. They shared how they used mixed methods to accommodate their students with special needs. Participants considered their use of multiple resources to accommodate students with disabilities. Running counterpoint to the discussion of the resources they used, were the resources they did not have. Out of this emerged the theme of resource deficiency. Teachers said they did not have some resources necessary to accommodate students with more than mild disabilities. The last theme to come out of the category of practice was grading. Specifically, participants used a variety of grading methods for students with disabilities.

Theme 3: Meeting the Needs of the Students

Most of the participants talked about their personal definitions of accommodations in a general manner, before going into specific accommodations. The emphasis in these definitions is differentiation within reason. Teachers felt that there existed a normal classroom experience.

Anything outside of what participants considered their normal teaching was considered an accommodation. Pete said:

> Accommodation is a change that a teacher makes to what is generally expected of every student in a particular class in order to meet the learning needs of a particular student. He added, So at the end of the day, [students with disabilities] are expected to be able to demonstrate that they learned what everyone else in the class learned.

Skip's definition was:

> Something that we offer as an institution that is outside the normal bounds of what you would offer a student.

Ophelia echoed the sentiment of a modification to her normal teaching methods. She offered, "Modifications within reason" as her definition. Matilda followed this line of thinking, discussing making changes to an existing curriculum. She defined accommodation as

> An adjustment to curriculum and instruction that does not compromise the overall integrity of the academic program.

The discussion of adjustment and change to an existing curriculum was echoed by Sylvia, who said,

> [An accommodation is] what's still going to allow [a student with disabilities] to meet the objectives of the course but making some form of an adjustment to allow for that, without sacrificing the objective of the course.

Cynthia shared the belief that any accommodations should not alter the integrity and learning outcomes of the class. She explained,

> Our goal [of accommodation] is not to make it easier, but to make it manageable. [In her opinion,] If you [students] want to be able to say that you took a class, you need to have accomplished in the end what everyone else accomplished.

When participants broadened their definitions of accommodation, the theme of meeting the students' needs emerged. Students of any ability learn in different ways. Gardner (1983)

indicated, “Learners may exhibit eight different types of intelligence including musical, visual, verbal, logical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic” (Gardner, 1983, p. 8).

Even in mainstream classes, successful teachers use multiple teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of their students. One of these strategies is personalization of learning. Personalization of learning represents the idea that learning should be customized for each student’s unique ability and interests. LaForce et al., (2016) asserted:

> Personalization of learning takes the classroom away from a “one-size-fits-all” strategy to allow for truly individualized instruction. Examples of components that comprise the personalization of learning element include “teacher differentiation of instruction based on learning needs,” “flexible schedule,” and “student autonomy.” (LaForce et al., 2016, p. 7)

The end goal of these strategies is to find the best way to put learning within the grasp of students; it’s meeting their needs.

Participants echoed this idea of meeting the needs of the students as part of their definitions of accommodation. Tony defined accommodations as

> Taking something that’s out of reach for a student and putting it in their reach. [He added,] It’s not making things easier, it’s about making things obtainable for [students with disabilities and,] It’s just putting it within their reach.

In his view, accommodation is extending teaching strategies in order to allow students with disabilities to learn in the way that best suits their needs. Nora felt that the goal was to for students to demonstrate learning as they were best able to do so. She said:

> For me, accommodation is about access to the content and demonstrating knowledge in the way that you [students] know best or the way that you [students] can demonstrate your knowledge the best. How can you [students] show me that you are, you know, learning?

Ophelia continued this theme. She expanded her original definition to include:

> What the students need when they need it. Case by case basis, gentling, no major modifications on assignments, Empathy and flexibility always.

Ophelia's inclusion of the word flexibility reinforces the connection to personalization of instruction connoting the ability and willingness to change on a case by case basis.

Theme 4: Using Mixed Methods to Accommodate Students with Disabilities

The participants were asked to give examples of accommodation practices they employed in their classes for students with disabilities. These practices built upon their definitions of accommodation that they perceived were possible to employ in a mainstream classroom, in a school that did not enroll students with significant disabilities. The theme that emerged built upon the participants' definitions of accommodation. Successful teachers should alter the curriculum to address the reality of the students' needs. Tomlinson (2014) wrote, "Quality curriculum requires clear and compelling learning goals used in ways that engage students' minds and lead to understanding." (Tomlinson, 2014, p .4). Expanding upon the idea of personalization of learning, teachers indicated they used mixed methods of teaching to accommodate their students with special needs. The examples that follow demonstrate mixed teaching methods.

Participants acknowledged using differentiated teaching methods to reach their students with disabilities. Ian stressed the importance of mixed teaching methods, saying:

> We all know everyone doesn't learn the same. So that is one of those common-sense basic functions. I think every teacher should teach a little bit of lecture, hands on video, graphic, all of these things, audio, visual, you know, all of these things to give the very number of learners we have in class the opportunity to [demonstrate learning].

Sylvia shared this belief. Some of Sylvia's accommodations included,

> modifications to curriculum, breaking down of assignments, taking notes for a student, allowing a student to verbally take an assessment rather than a written assessment. An

> accommodation might include something like allowing a student to type notes rather than write their notes. Extended time on testing, taking an assessment outside of a classroom or a different environment, there are numerous different accommodations that can be listed in terms of what our school [can offer] and how we determine that.

Nora also listed different types of teaching that would help accommodate her students with disabilities. Nora's responded:

> Sometimes. I modify tests and quizzes. Sometimes I do presentations, not, um, with the whole class because of students who have anxiety. She also discussed, What's difficult for some [students with disabilities] is sitting in the classroom and actually focusing. You can get up in the back [of the room] or use yoga balls.

The above examples demonstrate participants' understanding of the importance of differentiated learning.

Teachers discussed instances of personalized learning in action. Sophia gave a specific example of one way she can demonstrate flexibility by altering the method for assessing learning:

> For example, I have a student doesn't talk in public. He's very intelligent, but he doesn't go and talk in public. He has proved me he knows all the material, but only if I have [him] do an oral presentation. He will do it with me in front of me, not in front of the class. He's not getting a free pass. It's just changing the way [he demonstrates learning]. Instead of asking maybe 10 questions, I only ask him two. To me it's [being] flexible, to change their assessment in a way that the student can still show me they are learning.

Pete also discussed an example of modifying an assessment. He said:

> A student doesn't have to turn in the same paper that everyone else turns in. It can be replaced with an oral exam, then maybe it doesn't take up much time at all. In fact, it might save me time because the oral exam takes less time than, than offering a lot of [written] feedback on a paper that wouldn't have been turned in.

Skip gave these examples demonstrating accommodation of students with special needs in action. He used,

> accommodations with extra time, sometimes with extra resources, sometimes with, not having to write (physically write), but instead to type their answers and use a screen, things like that.

One method used to accommodate students with disabilities (as demonstrated by Skip) was to allow extra time for classroom activities. Tony employed extra time for testing, saying:

> If a student can't absorb or digest a test in the normal block time or the time allotted, then in a way that test is out of their reach because it's in too short of a time. So, by bringing it to their reach, some they extend the time in a chunk that they can manage.

Nora echoed this sentiment. According to Nora,

> Extended time on tests? My philosophy is everyone gets as much time as they need.

Other methods of instruction for students with disabilities included self-directed learning. In these cases, teachers gave students an assignment that allowed them freedom to complete teacher-set goals by means and methods with which they were most comfortable. Tony discussed one such strategy to make science easier for his students to digest:

> Students get an 8 x 10 sketchbook that has blank pages in it, and I create all of the notes on a website with images and I put it in a more colloquial language that is easier them to digest. And what they do is they take the notes in their sketchbook and then they either draw, print an image, they have to have an image for every concept. So, they're making this textbook. My point was that by the end of the class, they read 100% of their textbook because they wrote their own textbook. But I allow them to have freedom to where as long as they have what's necessary, they can add whatever they want. And so some students add tons of pictures to help them. Some students will rewrite the notes in a language that' understandable for them. And I tell them that they can write it however they want. It doesn't have to be my language. They cut and paste and stick pictures in there or they are drawing these for the most part. So, they can put the images, they can use images from any resource that they have, so they can take pictures themselves, they can print pictures or they can draw them. Some of the students are more artistically inclined, do some amazing sketches. Other students will just Google image a picture and print it and glue it in.

Tony's example included attempts to reach students with different learning styles, including visual, verbal, logical, kinesthetic, and interpersonal skills.

Participants employed multiple strategies to accommodate their students with disabilities, demonstrating flexibility and empathy. According to the ethic of care, three major elements that characterize the consciousness of the who is cared-for are reception, recognition, and response (Noddings, 2005a). Teachers clearly cared for their students with disabilities but believed there was responsibility on the part of students (the cared-for) to self-advocate for, as Matilda put it, "agency, initiative and independence." Ian stated,

> If a student can't advocate for themselves, that makes it harder. I've had very good success with students who do advocate for themselves in the classroom. They have obviously done well.

Matilda gave an example of the importance of fostering self-advocacy through coaching students with disabilities to learn and improve time management. She said:

> This is the due date and it doesn't budge with students who are still learning how to manage their learning differences. [It's important students] learn different tools and strategies, allowing them to turn in some things late and allowing for that as they're kind of wrapping their heads around things [in high school].

Teachers contend that without initiative and responsibility on the part of students with disabilities, teachers will have a more difficult time fostering constructive care.

Theme 5: Using Multiple Resources to Accommodate Students with Disabilities

Participants were asked to discuss what resources they needed to accommodate students with disabilities. The question was open to interpretation. It could mean resources they currently had at their disposal as well as what they believed they needed in order to provide more comprehensive accommodations. In the case of resources they currently used, as there was a continuum of practices teachers could employ to accommodate their students with special needs, available resources helped to determine the level and quality of services provided to students

with special needs. All teachers had access to an online learning platform, Schoology, which they were required to use for posting assignments, lectures, due dates, and other learning tools.

The classrooms on campus were similarly laid out: desks, chairs, teacher desk, dry-erase boards, etc. Although there were classrooms with computer stations, not every teacher had access to a classroom with enough computers for each of their students. There was a shared computer lab in the Learning Commons (a multi-purpose learning center), but demand among teachers for use of the lab is high. According to Skip, "It's just about impossible to reserve it."

The list of resources teachers at St. Dymphna currently used to accommodate students with special needs fell roughly into three categories: help from a counselor or the learning specialist, technology (including the Schoology learning platform), and time. The learning specialist at St. Dymphna coordinates accommodation with teachers and students, with input from the school's academic counselors and the parents of the students. Technology includes computers and the software used to enhance education for students. The Schoology learning platform is just that, an empty platform that requires teachers to fill it with the information and software they wish students to use. This takes a great deal of time on the part of teachers to prepare. Participants expressed the need for time for technology, creating manageable lesson plans, and engaging with their students (including those with disabilities) to meet their needs. Ophelia and Nora's responses summarized these needs. Ophelia listed resources she employed

> Technology (computer lab). Screens and headsets. You Tube, recordings, videos. Clear instructions from the learning specialist.

Nora's one-word response was "Time."

Participants stressed the need to work with academic counselors and the learning specialist to help accommodate students with special needs. Sarah is the school's learning specialist. She

holds a Pupil Personnel Services credential in counseling with the state of California. According to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2020), the specialization in School Counseling [credential] authorized the holder to perform the following duties:

1. Develop, plan, implement, and evaluate a school counseling and guidance program that includes academic, career, personal, and social development.
2. Advocate for the high academic achievement and social development of all students.
3. Provide schoolwide prevention and intervention strategies and counseling services.
4. Provide consultation, training, and staff development to teachers and parents regarding students' needs. (para. 3)

Sarah's current responsibilities requires her to engage in all of these duties. Sylvia discussed the importance of the learning specialist as a resource. She explained:

> The learning specialist here is really designed to be a support for teachers, the resource for teachers to provide special trainings if necessary, on an as-needed basis. And then if there are challenges that [the learning specialist] is seeing, to also go in and observe students in classes and then to, coordinate with teachers about where they may need more support.

In Sarah's words, her job is:

> solely is to support teachers and to support students. [About working with teachers, she said,] When we do workshops and [discuss] specific skills [engaging students with disabilities], you know, examples of what teachers can do in a classroom, [those suggestions] aren't always followed.

She says these are the exception, not the rule. She explained:

> I think at St. Dymphna's we're very lucky because over the years I've been here, teachers have been very open. I know prior to me coming here, a lot of [the challenge] was how do we get the teachers on board and supportive. I really don't have problems with that.

> I've been here seven years now; teachers are very supportive of supporting students. So, I think that's a benefit. Um, you know, I think at St. Dymphna's we're pretty fortunate.

Teachers discussed their interaction with the learning specialist.

The learning specialist acts as a source of instruction for teachers, a liaison between educators and students, and an empowering source of support. Tony talked about the importance of having St. Dymphna's full-time learning specialist as a resource. He stated:

> Our school has a learning specialist and sometimes she will reach out and ask me to do certain things for students. For example, what she's asking me to do was, [in the past] I've had vocabulary tests with word banks and on the front page is a word bank, and I've just typed all of the words out. She said that [the word bank] is hard to look at when it's just a long list of words and she's had me break those up in columns. I wouldn't have known that on my own because I've had no formal training. She's helped me with formatting my tests to help students that have different learning disabilities.

Skip talked about the importance of the school's learning specialist as a resource to accommodate students with disabilities, stating:

> Sometimes I do have to be proactive to get the counselor or the learning specialist involved to question them about what would be appropriate for, you know, accommodating [students with disabilities]. How can I help them and in conjunction with the counselor?

Pete stressed how the learning specialist acted, not only as a fundamental resource, but an empowering one:

> The second thing was support for making those accommodations, uh, from counseling and learning specialists. At least for me, it helped to know not just that this would help this student, but why? Why is it that this would help this student, but it wouldn't help this other student? An increased understanding of the 'why' for accommodations increased my own capacity to offer them. If you knew why providing [an accommodation] was important or why that might work, that would change both your attitude towards that particular student and maybe even for another student for something else. And I think knowing the why, that's the critical piece because then it empowers the teacher. It empowered me to make sort of analogous accommodations for other students without even needing to hear from a learning specialist or get an IEP (individualized education program) or anything like that. I could make those calls on my own as an educator in the classroom because I was empowered to do it in another case.

Teachers use the learning specialist as an important resource to help them educate, support, and accommodate students with special needs.

Teachers also discussed the importance of technology as a resource. Before St. Dymphna's adopted the Schoology platform, Tony set up his own website for students to engage with. He said:

> I originally built my own website and it was easier for me [to post things for students]. . . . St. Dymphna right now uses something called Schoology and what I do is I cut and paste from my website and paste it directly to Schoology. I still like to use my website for formatting reasons and then I just take that information and I put it directly on Schoology.

Matilda also discussed using the Schoology platform. She stated:

> The learning management system [is] where deadlines are posted up in the right-hand corner for [students] and shows them what's overdue and what's coming up. If we as a faculty are utilizing it appropriately, so that the assignments really are showing up as assignments with deadlines, then those sorts of things help students with organizational issues and being able to keep track of what's happening.

Still, the learning platform was not without its problems. Ian acknowledged using Schoology as a learning resource but indicated a need for further training, He stated:

> One of the complaints I've heard is [students] get lost. They don't know where to look for things and you know, they, they're unfamiliar with the actual how to use the, the website, whether it's a lack of motivation on their part or a lack of instruction on the teacher's point. One of the things the students try to point out is how it's designed, how it could be more adaptable to their uses as opposed to the teachers use. [Teachers] are not completely aware of all the functions of the website.

The discussion of the use of the learning platform bookends Ophelia's mention of YouTube, computers, headsets, etc. These technological resources are taken for granted as teachers and students expect to engage with technology in many ways in the twenty-first century.

Participants discussed time as a resource they needed in order to accommodate students with special needs. Teachers needed more time to engage and support their students. The importance of time was repeated by the participants:

> In a single class session, I can't get to every student and it comes to the writing process. I can't give every student the feedback they need. (Ian)
>
> The traditional educational process puts everyone in such a time crunch where you have to learn something by a certain point. (Sylvia)
>
> We know that this is something [students are] struggling with because the issue really isn't, "we're not supposed to be assessing them on whether or not they can get things done by a certain time." (Matilda)

Participants felt they needed more time to prepare for instruction. Tony discussed the use of a personal website and the learning platform as a resource. Accompanying these resources was the need for time. He said:

> In the very beginning I spent one hour every day for an entire for an entire school year, just designing it. And then the second year it was almost an equal amount of time, but it was more formatting and cleaning it up. So it took me about two years to really design it. And it's a living document. I'm always changing it, but now it's much easier since I invested the time.

Cynthia lamented,

> I don't have the resources to be able to sit down with a student one-on-one for tutoring, proper tutoring because I have work that I also need to get done.

Participants keenly stressed the need for more time. What is not evident in the transcript of these interview answers are non-verbal cues; it was the look on the teachers' faces whenever any practice involving time was discussed. There were many weary sighs, much shaking of heads, and rolling of eyes. Teachers keenly felt the need for the time necessary to construct engaging and meaningful accommodation for students with special needs. The discussion also revealed deficiencies of resources, as described next.

Theme 6: Considering Current Resource Deficiencies

While discussing resources available for accommodating students with special needs, participants talked about their inability to adequately meet the needs of all of their students because of resources that were unavailable or in short supply. Among these were class sizes, a lack of information about their particular students' disabilities, and a need for more preparation and instruction accommodating students with special needs. There was also a strong perception among the participants that St. Dymphna's School was not prepared to adequately accommodate all students with disabilities.

Participants discussed their frustration with the size of their classes. Borne out of a desire to support all of their students, teachers felt overwhelmed and unable to adequately meet the needs of all of their students because of the sheer number with whom they had to engage. Ian explained his concern, stating,

> Classroom sizes? Even without learning disabilities, we can't give the instruction that the kids need in class. Um, in a class of 20, it's hard to give every student 15 minutes of time. So that takes me three or four class periods to get through every student in a writing classroom.

Olivia also felt unable to fully accommodate all of her students. She said,

> We're not giving [students with disabilities] the attention they need. Those kids that truly need it . . . if we can, you know, spread those [large] classes in half, it will definitely change the dynamic too. And the students that need help will get it more in the classroom.

Cynthia also requested smaller class sizes, explaining,

> I don't know how you're supposed to form a meaningful relationship with each individual student. If you've got 23 kids in a class and you're just trying to make sure you have their attention versus actually really getting to know them and what they need.

Smaller class size was not the only resource that participants felt prevented them from being able to best accommodate their students with special needs. Teachers felt hamstrung by a lack of information about their particular students' disabilities. Skip said,

> The number one resource to begin accommodating students is to have the information as to what the affliction or disability is. That is provided on a case by case basis.

There was a sense that it took time before teachers noticed unusual learning symptoms in their students with disabilities. Sophia also desired more information about each particular student's disability. Sophia stated:

> I think that's very important. Sometimes we notice something going on with the student but we don't know [if they have a documented disability]. Sometimes the counselors don't know because the families are not disclosing the information. Sometimes families don't want to and sometimes I think it makes our work very hard and our life very difficult. For many students, we don't get any information until November or December. That is already very hard because the kids have been suffering.

Teachers felt they had lost valuable time properly educating students with disabilities because they were not given explicit details about their students' needs.

This lack of shared information could not be solely attributed to the learning specialist. A student's eligibility under IDEA (2004) can only be determined by a full and individual evaluation of the child. Parents may request that their child be evaluated. As discussed in the review of the literature, public schools must evaluate the child at no cost to parents. The school may also request an evaluation of a student, based on a teacher's recommendation, observations, or results from tests. The school system must ask parents for permission to evaluate the child, and parents must give their informed written permission before the evaluation may be conducted (IDEA, 2004). Parents are not required to disclose their child's disabilities if they choose not to do so. Olivia expressed her frustration, saying,

> Parents really, you know, they, their mindsets are like, "Oh no, my son or my daughter, they're okay." They [feel] their children don't have issues, you know, so they don't provide them with or find them the resources sooner. Now that they're in high school, now it's too late.

Teachers acknowledged that they were not sufficiently prepared to accommodate all students with disabilities. They discussed the need for further professional development that offered instruction teaching those students. Skip said:

> We have a learning specialist on campus and so we get instructions with regard to how to handle certain cases that are in our classrooms that um, you know, young people that otherwise other teachers, other faculty, other staff don't necessarily have any knowledge of the disability. We get some knowledge of the disability enough to be able to react in certain situations and whether they have special accommodations. So this instruction is, this is on a case by case basis, case by case basis. Yes. And, and I would say that it's not, it's not necessarily, it's not training, it's instruction on, on how to react or what to do. It's not, I'm not trained to be, you know, the person handling the case per se.

He went further, explaining,

> I would need specific training for knowing how to not only handle but perhaps even recognize these types of things.

Skip felt a certain inadequacy that was shared by other participants. Ian shared Skip's feeling of inadequacy. Ian answered:

> You can be poor and vulnerable in so many ways. Um, in this case, the, those with disability, I actually think I'm doing them a disservice because I am not properly equipped to help them all the way. Um, is it something I'm willing to try? Yes. I have friends in special ed, and I've asked them lots of questions and it really depends on the severity of that disability. Is it something I can work with? Yes. Is it something that might need work on? Yes. Uh, but I don't think I'm serving them as well as I probably could be because I am personally not trained to do it.

Sophia reflected on her college courses teaching students with disabilities,

> I think it was not enough. I wish that that class in college was not one year. I wish that we had that class for at least three years. [She went on to say,] I feel like I have done research on my own. Yes, we have done professional development and we have some materials and we have some ideas, but I usually go and check books online or check from

> other teachers. There's other teacher resources not only in the school, but also online that I can see other people using.

Olivia's opinion was similar. She said,

> I think because the teachers at the high school level, you know, they're for the most part, they like to find out and, they try to research and educate themselves at least a little bit because they're in the trenches dealing with these kids.

Combined with this perception of a lack of preparation was a general sense that St. Dymphna's was not fully equipped to accommodate all students with disabilities.

Even when they did not share specific examples, participants felt that the St. Dymphna's School did not possess the resources necessary to adequately meet the needs of all students with disabilities. Sylvia said:

> The majority of the students that are here don't have extreme needs that would require [significant] modification of curriculum. We're very clear about that in the admissions process as well. When we do receive those questions, 'what sorts of accommodations does St. Dymphna offer to students?' And so we explained that while we can make adjustments, things like preferential seating, breaking down of information, we don't provide one-on-one resource support and we do not provide modification of assignments and we do not have faculty with special education credentials.

Skip shared this assessment. He said:

> At St. Dymphna's School, we don't have facilities for more extreme or more serious cases that would require accommodation. We don't have facilities for that and frankly we don't have the personnel for that. We have a learning specialist. But there are clearly limits to what we can help with. There are people out there who are beyond our capacity to assist with accommodation.

Sarah shared the perception that the school was unprepared to accommodate students with more extreme disabilities. She replied with an example:

> If a student comes in and needs to have all their exams read orally to them, every single class, we don't have the facilities and the personnel to do that. That's an accommodation we could not meet. Some of the other accommodations that we can't meet are due to our teachers and what their responsibilities are. Because they have so many students, it's just

> not possible. We don't have the ability to do one on one. So that's where some of the accommodations cannot be met.

She believed that the school lacked the resources to provide more comprehensive accommodations. Matilda shared,

> We cannot require faculty to make adjustments that add a significant amount of work time, which then compromises the academic program if the faculty is compromised in their time management.

These educators shared a perception that St. Dymphna's lacked resources such smaller class size, proper teacher preparation, and sufficient personnel. Participants felt sufficient support with some resources, but clearly felt that there were limits to the degree of accommodation of students with special needs that St. Dymphna's could offer.

Theme 7: Using a Variety of Grading Methods for Students with Disabilities

Teachers were asked about grading methods. If students with disabilities were receiving accommodations to help them to learn, how was that learning being assessed? The participants discussed any changes to their grading methods, and what, if anything, differed from methods used for students without disabilities. Recurring methods included alternative assessments, altering the degree of difficulty to demonstrate successful completion of rubric items, allowing students multiple attempts to demonstrate learning, and offering extra credit.

Teachers offered examples of alternative assessments. These could be alternative exams, quizzes, in-class assignments, or homework. In each case the goal was for students with disabilities to demonstrate learning, mastery, or completion of a benchmark. Tony offered the following reflection:

> What I do is I will let the students try and show me the knowledge they've obtained in my course in different ways. I had a student one year who she would get so sick to her stomach when it came to taking a test. And she would take a test and she would get like

> 15% out of 100% test. Um, if you just guessed answers, your odds are you do better. And so what I did was I allowed her to sit down and discuss the questions and answers with me. And I graded it the same way I would a regular paper. But any student who wanted that accommodation, I would give it to them. It wasn't just because she needed it, I would do it for any student. Um, because whether a student has learning disabilities or not, you don't know what aspect of education they're struggling with.

Tony's goal was for the student to demonstrate learning; this is the same goal he has for all of his students. He simply adjusted the way he assessed learning as an accommodation to his student's needs. Nora also allowed students to demonstrate learning through ways that best meshed with the students interests or abilities. She explained she practices,

> employing multiple modalities of learning so that everyone has a chance to show it in whatever capacity to [demonstrate learning]. I mean, there's even opportunities where if, if making a video is your thing, that is something the students come up to you and ask. I like to give it as an option.

Pete thought for a minute before responding with his reflection. He said:

> Well, I think what produces equitable grading is equitable assessment. And because we have to draw a distinction between two students who have done the exact same assignment, written the same paper, but one has dyslexia and the other one doesn't, how does that give me evidence that they both learn the same things if one has a particularly difficult time with writing compared to the other? And so, I'm learning as a teacher that I'm going to have a better shot of understanding the learning of these two students by giving them two different assessments based on their strengths and based on where they struggle. So it might be an oral exam, an actual conversation with the kid where they are able to demonstrate clearly their knowledge of a particular topic and then another student, the best way for them to demonstrate that knowledge is through a traditional assessment of paper or even a [traditional] exam. I think equitable grading starts with equitable assessment and then even before that is equitable instruction.

For these participants, the goal of assessment was for students to demonstrate learning. The method did not need to be equal, they needed to be equitable.

Teachers also discussed altering the degree of difficulty on assessments. Olivia discussed offering questions and problems of differing degrees of difficulty as part of her accommodation practice. When calculating a grade, she offered:

> I can easily say, well did you do numbers one, three, and the last one, or just one and two? I give them that choice as long as you do one and two and I'm good and you'll get that [credit]. Exams, quizzes, and, and even an exit ticket inform whether or not [something] should be graded or how much it should be worth, etc.

Sophia reflected upon how, even though the rubric may be the same for all students, she will adjust her definition of what constitutes reaching a benchmark. She explained:

> I use the same rubrics. I just tend to look for skills that I need them to show me. I am allowing them to be doing the same things, skills-wise. The rubrics are the same but the way that I use the rubric, it's maybe a little bit lighter in a way. I'm not looking for a perfect performance but more for is this student to be able to say this or use that. That doesn't mean that my student is getting a free pass. They are still showing and still demonstrating and still presenting or writing. If a student [without disabilities] needs to write three paragraphs, this student [with disabilities] maybe only need to [write] like one-and-a-half. For me it's the same. Your paragraph-and-a-half is equivalent to the three paragraphs for the other students.

In these examples we can goals similar to those of offering alternative assessments. Teachers sought to allow students with disabilities to demonstrate learning in ways that were equitable, if not equal.

One of the common requests from students of any ability is for teachers to give them extra credit. This usually is meant to mean an additional assignment that a student can compete in order to improve their grade. Participants in this study were generally not enthusiastic fans of extra credit, even though they may offer it on occasion. Skip stated,

> I'm not a huge fan of extra credit. I do offer a couple of extra credit assignments though, per semester.

Teachers who allowed extra credit made a point of offering it to all of their students, not just those with disabilities. Sophia said:

> I don't use [extra credit] very often; extra credit means extra work for them and for me. So extra credit, is something that usually goes hand-in-hand with a special thing that you need to do. For example, they have to visit a place or go to a museum and do a presentation about that. So the kids who wanted to go and see the exhibition and came

> back to give a review of what they see. That's an extra credit. And that's for everyone. Everybody, not specifically for one student.

Ophelia said,

> Extra credit is rare and is offered to all students, regardless of disability.

Olivia added:

> Those extra credit assignments don't have any relationship to what the assignment that the kid or those concepts that the kid is missing. You know, can you try to just give them something, okay, do this really random thing or work and then I'll give you [student with disabilities] credit for it.

The feeling among these participants is that, while extra credit may seem like a compassionate adjustment to the curriculum, it deterred students from doing their work as assigned, when assigned. The effect being to create more work for both student and teacher.

Participants discussed allowing students to demonstrate learning by offering them several attempts to reach a learning benchmark. The grade for these particular assessments would be whatever the student submitted as their latest attempt. Ian stated,

> [All students] are allowed to redo that assignment, mastering that skill that's asked of them in that assignment. They see what grade they've gotten on that [assignment] and they have the choice to redo it or not.

Like Ian, Ophelia offered multiple attempts at the same assignment. She said,

> Writing assignments may be reworked, edited, and resubmitted by students as many times as necessary.

Sophia shared a desire to allow students to demonstrate learning through multiple attempts at the same assignment. Sylvia responded:

> One of the things that we've talked about with department chairs and program directors is about the idea of when a student has not mastered a concept. We've covered it, but have they reached a level of proficiency? And when that hasn't happened, do we allow students to retake an exam or to re-do an assignment because that will ultimately mean they're proving that they've now mastered the material? They may have taken a little

> more time to do it, but what's wrong with that? I think the traditional educational process puts everyone in such a time crunch where you have to learn something by a certain point. But that's just what we're learning and what we know about the human brain is that that's just not how learning happens. Um, and it's not just for students with learning challenges that's across the board for everyone in your class. So something that I do in my classes is that I allow for students to retake an assessment or resubmit.

Skip offered a slightly different way of offering an additional attempt at an assignment. He allowed his student to correct mistakes they made on exams. He explained,

> I'll allow test corrections. Again, this is across the board and when I do offer test corrections, I put those in [the gradebook] out of zero. They get partial credit on the questions they missed on the test.

Some of the participants chose not to adjust their grading methods for their students with disabilities. Tony said,

> I don't [make changes to grading], I try and keep my grading consistent with all of the students. So, I don't really change grading.

However, his grading may apply to a finished product as he offers multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning. Ian did not offer different grading to students with disabilities. His grading method was equal for all students. Skip did not change his grading for students with disabilities. All students had access to the same ways to demonstrate learning and to improve their grades. Cynthia's response was,

> I really don't [make changes to grading]. I ask a concept once and I'm done. So, shortening a task. I don't do. I don't, and I don't know how I could, while still being still being fair to other students.

Category 3: Perception

Part of this study was to determine perceptions of teachers at a Catholic high school toward their students with disabilities. Bulgren et al. (2006) noted that teachers have reported lower expectations of their students and reduced efficacy regarding instructing students with

disabilities. Many teachers reported feeling underqualified to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities (Kiely, 2011). Participants in this study were asked how students with disabilities impacted their classes. There are no separate classes for students with disabilities at St. Dymphna's. Students of all abilities share the same teachers, same classrooms, and same resources. This is the case at the majority of Catholic high schools across the United States (Carlson, 2014). Participants indicated both positive impacts on the class environment and challenges as well. In this study, educators were asked to reflect upon their perception of students with disabilities by reflecting upon how those students impacted the atmosphere of their classrooms. Participants found that students with disabilities offered both benefits and challenges to their classrooms. I begin this section with teachers' perceived benefits.

Theme 8: Appreciating Positive Contributions Presented by Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

The findings for this theme are organized into two categories: first, positive contributions and then, challenges. Participants recognized several positive contributions students with disabilities offered their classrooms. Teachers found that students with no disability, but who still struggle in school, benefited from teachers' use of the multiple teaching methods they employ for their students with disabilities. They also believed that students gained increased empathy for students with disabilities by working with them in collaborative classroom settings. Olivia said:

> Sometimes they do it in a positive way if we are in a group setting. When I do activities like that, [students with disabilities] are just like any other student. I go and individually ask everybody to ask a question that they didn't understand during the lesson. The other students are working, but then I'm right next to them and I show them how to do the problem again, one on one. And then that's when I take the opportunity to ask [students with disabilities] if they can come and see me after school. Students [without disabilities] even know some [students with disabilities] might be struggling, so [my one-on-one work] has motivated students.

Cynthia believed that participation of students with disabilities relaxed other students, who in turn were empowered to ask questions. She replied:

> I actually really like it because, um, for chemistry they're really encouraged if they have a question or they don't understand something to ask. That leads to questions that I think that the higher achieving students are too afraid to ask maybe, or that they're not 100% sure on. So it leads to great questions. Um, in conversations in general.

Again, the perceived impact of students with disabilities is positive because of better engagement by students without disabilities. Ophelia's experience reinforced the idea that other students benefited from the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom. Ophelia stated:

> Often, students without disabilities benefit from the presence of students with disabilities. They learn to be more empathetic and obtain a new perspective of learning. Practices, methods, and techniques needed to reach students with disabilities help ensure that all students are engaged in deeper learning. When I think of them as kids who need a little more help, it diminishes the idea that they require more work.

Discussions of empathy and a feeling of security followed.

Sarah discussed her perception of how students with no disability reacted to their classmates with disabilities. In this case, she talked about whether students were envious or resentful of students with disabilities who received special accommodations. Sarah stated:

> Because we have a lot of families who believe, Oh, St. Dymphna's is the place. Well that's not true for every student. Um, I have very few students who are uncomfortable coming up to me. There's always a couple but it's something I take a lot of pride in. I think that there's empathy. I think the kids have an understanding why some students need more support and are not upset about that. I think that they understand that that's something the student needs, um, and are not upset. Students are very open about talking about their accommodations here.

Pete's experience echoed the feeling that all students benefitted from the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom, even if they, personally, did not receive any special accommodations. According to Pete:

> There were additional requests [for accommodation], but none of them were onerous. None of them were. I never got the sense that students wanted to sort of take advantage of it. Um, and none of them were disruptive. If [students with disabilities] were properly accommodated, they almost always benefited the classroom environment. If they were not properly accommodated, their frustration, uh, would become evident or their inability to thrive would become evident.

These observations highlighted the perception that students became more emotionally mature and empathetic due to their interaction with students with disabilities.

Some teachers believed that having students with disabilities in the classroom positively impacted the learning environment by making them better teachers. In order to reach their students with disabilities, teachers had to ensure they were using multiple teaching methods, thus reaching students who, although having no disabilities, benefitted from alternative learning strategies. Sophia responded:

> If you know [a student] has a disability, the kids [might not] even realize it. I work a lot in groups in my class. So usually when I teach and lecture, then they work in groups, I go into one-on-one with the student [with disabilities], but I do it with everybody. So, it doesn't show that I'm just doing it for him. [As far as the students without disabilities are concerned], I'm not doing anything special for this student.

In this case, Sophia was able to tend to the needs of students with disabilities while ensuring that all students were receiving her attention during a classroom exercise. She accomplished this without any discernable outward change in the classroom setting. Skip shared a similar experience. He replied:

> Here at St. Dymphna's I feel the impact is almost always minimal in the sense that if I know the student has a disability and has an accommodation, that accommodation usually occurs outside of the classroom, usually in a testing environment or an assessment environment. So, in class the only real effect is that sometimes it, I moderate how I'm communicating information, at any given moment, trying to give more of a variety of different styles of communication in order to try to reach this particular [student] or these particular [students].

In Skip's case, students with disabilities minimally impacted the outward appearance of the class while pushing him to mix up his teaching methods to reach as many learners as possible. Nora had this to say about the positive impact of students with disabilities in her classroom. She said:

> So, I think it can be really positive. I think sometimes if you're hyper-sensitive to something or someone, then you can become a better teacher. If you know that some of your students need more visuals, you think of that more. If you know that there's someone who [has trouble] focusing there's different ways of [teaching].

These answers expressed appreciation for students with disabilities in the classroom as presence of those students pushed teachers to improve their teaching methods. They also demonstrated the perception that students with disabilities increased empathy and understanding in their classmates without disabilities.

Theme 9: Acknowledging Challenges Presented by Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

Teachers indicated that the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom also presented challenges to the learning environment. Some of the challenges discussed included an altered pace of the class, extra time from teachers, and the need for more vigorous classroom management. When asked about the impact of students with disabilities in the classroom, Tony replied:

> Sometimes it could be unfair to a student where the pace and the material isn't accessible to them. I have to then spend almost every day tutoring that student, trying to find the areas that they need help in and work with them. At [St. Dymphna's] that ends up being the individual teachers [who have to stay and tutor]. So a kid could sink or swim. Um, there's teachers who you either need to keep up the class or not, or there's teachers who will go out of their way and work with those students. Uh, so I think it's really rough when you don't have programs in place for those types of students. It's really difficult when you have a class where you have maybe five students that need you to go much slower, and then you have 15 students that need you to go faster.

Ian replied,

> The ones that probably have the highest impact is the ADHD students, mostly because it's behavioral, like talking out of turn. It's mostly attention getting on their part. I hate to admit it, but those that who [I know] have been medicated have actually been better in the classroom.

Like Ian, Nora saw some challenges that came with having students with disabilities in her classes. She stated:

> Sometimes you have a lot of students who require a lot of attention. You have a kid who might shut down in one class. I mean you have, you know, there could be 25, 30 students in your classroom. You have a student who doesn't feel good and wants to go to the office. There's a lot going on. You, you have to really, um, be observant.

Participants indicated an understanding that increased accommodation resulted in an increased workload.

There was also concern among participants that mixed classrooms increased tension among students and teachers. Sarah replied:

> A lot of students are just kind of pushed along so they don't even know how to approach a teacher. I think there's a lot of empathy. There's a lot of care. I think some teachers do lose their patience, come off a little harsh sometimes. I think we are a community of compassion and I think, as a whole, St. Dymphna's does an outstanding job in empathy and care for a student. I think some teachers think we do too much for students and I understand that completely.

This response makes clear that, although St. Dymphna's is an empathetic caring community, students and teachers alike are only human. They may not know the best method to accomplish a goal or they might lose their patience. Matilda echoed the human nature of students in the classroom. Matilda's response was,

> Students want to avoid looking dumb, you know, don't we all? And so they will manifest that in different ways in order to call themselves out before anybody else can or deflect. They don't want to seem foolish in front of their peers. So I think that's where a lot of acting out comes from.

Sylvia added a twist in her response. She said,

> A lot of times I think [students with disabilities] don't negative negatively affect the atmosphere. But I think our atmosphere can negatively affect them because then they are constantly trying to keep up and that does an absolute disservice to them.

This last statement recalls the idea of the challenge of classroom pacing while bringing a human element into the conversation.

Category 4: Reflection

The fourth category that emerged from the interview process resulted from asking participants what compelled them to serve students with disabilities. Real care only happens with reflection. Reflection is a challenging process that helps caregivers decide what to do and how to respond (Noddings, 2013). The reflections in this category demonstrated elements of CST and a strong ethic of care. They ran the gamut from religious motivation to personal reasons. Participants were asked how their teaching methods served the poor and vulnerable of their school community. Elements of CST include the option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation. The following responses directly reflected my third research question: To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities? Two themes emerged from this category of questions. They included educators called to serve by personal and religious reasons and seeing all students (including students with disabilities) as poor and vulnerable members of the community.

Theme 10: Called to Serve by Personal and Religious Reasons

Participants seemed more thoughtful and deliberate when answering questions about why they chose to work in a Catholic school serving all students, including students with disabilities. For some, religion was a strong motivator:

> As a Catholic they teach you that Jesus really hung out with the poor, the vulnerable, the ones that were outcast, you know, you want to do that. And I really pray and try to figure things out and try to be a better person. (Olivia)
>
> There is the Christian obligation (as laid out in CST) to serve the vulnerable. (Ophelia)
>
> I think it is part of the Catholic ethos. I think that sort of comes to be a conundrum because as Catholics or as a Catholic in a Catholic school, we should be in a perfect world, we should be in the front line of helping anybody and everybody. (Skip)
>
> I am a product of Catholic schooling. I worked 28 out of 30 years in Catholic education. So, I really believe in social justice; I really believe that we are here to care for other and to ease their way. (Sophia)
>
> My religious beliefs influenced me mostly because of that commitment to social justice and understanding the difference between equality and equity and recognizing the different students and different colleagues need different things. (Pete)

Each of these responses shares a commitment to social justice and an ethic of care. Sylvia's response echoed one of the missions of the school. She answered,

> Know me, care for me and ease my way, right? That's the charism of St. Dymphna's.

Each of the participants discussed a facet of care for others, a desire to make a more just and verdant society, and a wish to ease the way of those in need.

Religious motivations were shared by educators who were not themselves Catholic. Ian, who is not Catholic, answered:

> Religious beliefs, this is for me, this is a tricky one. But again, it's one of the reasons I've come here. It's the philosophy of the school and it is guided by religion; it started as a religious endeavor. So the [founders of the school], who I really like . . . pioneered this idea of inclusion. So, I think at the very core of the school inclusion is mandatory. It's important. So, you feel that the, the administration yeah. Does spread that message very much.

Sarah, who is Jewish, stated,

> From a religious standpoint, I'm Jewish, there's a phrase called *Tikkun Olam*. It means repairing the world. It's something I believe in. Judaism all about social justice, helping

> our community just like Catholicism. And I feel very compelled, uh, to be that person to help.

These responses echo the idea of an educational calling based upon a desire to see social justice and a compulsion to care.

Participants were also driven to accommodate students with disabilities by personal reasons. Some of the reasons included becoming a parent, as in Olivia's case. Her response was very personal. She said:

> I think it's just how to be, to be a role model, you know. I've always thought that, even when I first started teaching, these kids are looking at me, so whatever they see and however I portray myself, I'm hoping that they can also see that [I'm a role model]. With the [students with disabilities] it changed when I became a mom. Once I became a mom, I felt more compelled to teach those kids and pay more attention because I always would envision how if my kid was that one, I wouldn't want anybody not helping them to learn something.

Olivia talked about her children, saying:

> My first, my oldest, he needed speech therapy. And when his teacher told me that he needed speech therapy, I was like, "oh no, he'll be fine", you know? But no, my son needed speech therapy, so I had to like really bite my tongue and I was, you know, devastated. But I mean he's fine now, but he definitely needed that speech therapy when he was young and the school or the institution where he was, was unable to provide that. I made him go to a Catholic private school because I wanted him in a Catholic private school. Should he have continued with the services? Yes, but he needed to go to public school to do them. So that's something that I, a little bit, I regret. My youngest son right now, he goes to speech therapy and right now I'm actually considering him going to public school just so he can just continue services.

Part of Ophelia's personal motivation, like Olivia's, stemmed from becoming a mother. But part of it was connected to her brother, who has a learning disability. She recalled:

> I have a brother with a disability. Over the course of our childhoods, I went from the younger sister to (intellectually) the bigger sister. I could see that my growth was surpassing his. My experience with my brother and the fact that I am a mother heightens my empathy and strengthens my commitment.

Like Ophelia, family formed part of Sarah's call to serve. She shared the following:

> My son has learning disabilities and he was in public school his whole life until 10th grade when he came to St. Dymphna's. Um, when he went to high school, the services were very poor; they were not supporting him. I had to fight for his services. I think there's been a lot of lack of compassion, a lack of support, lack of education, so I've been concerned about that. Obviously, that has a view on how I want to make sure that every student has the support they need.

In each of these cases, familial relationships formed a connecting bridge to caring relationships with students with disabilities. Compassion, empathy, and being role model for family mirrored their desire to do the same for students.

Some of the participants felt called to serve as educators because of their own experiences in school. Tony said:

> As a science major, I saw so many students turned away from the sciences because it was made more of an advanced, almost elitist major where either you can keep up or you can't. And what I saw was college campuses where you have students that are either disgusted by the sciences or love the sciences and there was like no in-between. I look at a society where we need scientifically minded people. We need people that can make critical decisions based on science. And I want to make science accessible to everybody. Whether you have a learning disability or not. I really want to make sure that students go into science courses and come out with a greater understanding of how the world works and how the universe works. I'm a teacher because I really care about educating children. I care more about educating children than the subject I teach, which is rare sometimes in the sciences.

The degree of difficulty society places upon the sciences and the techniques used by his professors drove Tony to teach his students in ways that were accessible for everyone. Nora also felt compelled to serve because of her experiences in college. She stated:

> My [university] professor . . . she really opened my eyes to what this is all about. That this is not really about the disability or the, um, the special need. But how is it that you can almost have empathy for what it is that they are? How can you understand it? How can you put yourself in their shoes and, uh, how can they learn?

While Nora's college experience was positive, Sophia drew inspiration to serve from negative experiences. Sophia responded:

> When I think back on my own personal formation as a teacher, the way [teaching students with disabilities] was introduced to me was very negative. And so I think it sort of contributes to this mentality that, you know, that's something you really want to avoid, which is very disheartening. And yet my own experiences contradict that completely because I've seen what we know about learning now. It's not a one size fits all. It can't be. And I think that's also how, you know, I was brought up an education. It was a one size fits all and everybody has to meet the same expectation. And yet, you know, there's that great, um, cartoon image of the fence, you know, and the goal is for everybody to be able to look over the fence. Everybody should be able to do that. Do [some students] need support to be able to accomplish that? Yes.

Matilda discussed her educational experience in her hands-on program with Fairfax county, Virginia's public-school system. She responded:

> My experience in Fairfax County public schools, which is the one of the top districts in the nation by the way. I knew from that program; I could never be a special education teacher. Some of [the students with disabilities], were not very well cared for by their families. And it was very difficult. I remember this one young man; he had been hit by a car three times because he got locked out of his house and there was no one home in his neighborhood. And so he would wander the neighborhood and he got hit by a car and it had happened on three separate occasions. I don't know if I have the resilience to leave that stuff at work.

These responses describe how educators' own experiences as students, even negative experiences, can lead them to be more caring, empathetic, and driven to educate students with disabilities.

There were other personal reasons given by participants to explain their compulsion to serve students with disabilities. For Skip, part of his drive came from neighbors he grew up with. He said:

> When I was growing up], I had a neighbor across the street and he clearly had acute learning disabilities. And [another neighbor] had a very difficult time speaking. I was kind of fearful for them because I knew as we were getting older that they were in a way being left behind and they were realizing it. And so through that personal experience that really formed my view of having to be extremely compassionate, knowing that sometimes the attitude that is being brought before you is a defense mechanism and not a trait that says this person's a bad person.

Skip's experience taught him to see the struggles of students with disabilities through their eyes. For Ian, CST themes of community and inclusion helped form part of his motivation to serve. Ian stated:

> One of the things we've done with our curriculum is integrate CSTs, community, restoration, identity, and that helps in bringing some of these issues to light. Inclusion is near and dear to me because I am not, uh, how can I put this nicely? I am not the dominant race. I am someone of minority. I am in a mixed relationship. My child has proven just as defined as I am and decided to not follow gender norms. All of these things are important.

Ian is driven in part by his experience searching for social justice and his recognition of his ability to provide agency for his students seeking social justice themselves. Cynthia responded,

> Seeing [students with disabilities] as someone's child and putting yourself in their shoes and realizing that your student, regardless of the fact that they're one of 20, is extremely important to the parents and the parents clearly care about their education or else they wouldn't be here.

Again, we see empathy among the participants. One participant's perspective sums up what many of the participants felt about the call to serve in the teaching profession. Sophia responded:

> [Caring] is the whole point. That's our job as a teacher.

Theme 11: Seeing all Students (Including Students with Disabilities) as Poor and Vulnerable Members of the Community

The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation are the three tenets of CST most closely tied to topic of this study. Participants were asked how the saw accommodating St. Dymphna's community of students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable. The spectrum of who is poor and who is vulnerable is broad; every student is poor or vulnerable in some way at different points in life. Participants were asked to reflect upon their caring service to

those students they considered poor and vulnerable. They offered their insight into who they saw as poor and vulnerable and made connections to service and care.

When asked to reflect upon this question, Tony responded:

> I think [teaching students with disabilities] fits perfectly in with [serving] the poor and vulnerable because these are people that can't help themselves when it comes to education. And I think that students with learning disabilities need us the most, and it makes them poor and vulnerable because they're not the students who will read the textbook on their own. They're not the students who will educate themselves on their own. They need this education and they need it in order to become better adults, functioning adults, adults that won't be taken advantage of.

Tony saw a connection between education and producing adults who would be more able to function in society. Skip saw a similar connection. Skip said:

> Well, the key there is defining what poverty and vulnerability are. And that's the thing. It's not just economic. We, we think poor and vulnerable. As, you know, the first impression that most people get is people who in society don't have a lot of money and who are exposed to dangers of society or shortcomings of society and things like that. But people can be vulnerable in emotional ways with regard to learning disabilities. People can be poor in their abilities to process information and things like that. And so, to that end, it's the calling of the school to help the poor and vulnerable. In a perfect world, we'd be doing that a lot more aggressively. We'd have a lot more facilities and a lot more training and things like that.

Skip saw injustice in the world, hoping to both combat it and prepare his students through education.

The theme of seeing all students (including students with disabilities) as poor and vulnerable members of the community carried on with other participants. Sophia stated:

> There are different types of poor and vulnerable to me. All teenagers and poor and vulnerable by definition. I think they are and they don't know what they want. Teaching in high school is already teaching to the poor and vulnerable. Serving them is our mission. It's the mission of a teacher; it's what we're here for, for those kids who need our help. That is the way that we care about poor and vulnerable. We have rich kids here who are poor and vulnerable in other ways.

Ophelia's answered:

> Our students are less poor or vulnerable than other schools. Though some of them are poor and all of them (especially those with disabilities) are vulnerable. Being here makes them smarter, kinder, and stronger. I often tell them they are better off than many. They can pay forward what they learn. Anything we do to bring students with disabilities more fully into the learning process is service.

Ophelia's response reinforces participants' belief that their students are vulnerable and in need of caring service.

Skip shared this observation about the vulnerability of his students with special needs and gave an example of how vulnerability may manifest itself:

> I think someone with a disability would feel exceedingly vulnerable. Anytime they're in a situation where that disability may be revealed in a way that shows they're incapable of doing something to the level of those around them. Uh, that and that, that's, that's a big vulnerability. And what that tends to do from my perspective and experience is that it tends to have that person closed themselves off. They seem aloof, they seem distant. They seem like they don't care that they don't want to be there. When in reality they're really just vulnerable. They're scared to death that they're going to be seen as lesser and unable.

This example harkens back to CST's mandates to recognize the dignity of all members of the community.

Pete considered the degree to which the educational system itself made students with disabilities even poorer and more vulnerable. Pete responded:

> Every adolescent is vulnerable in one way or another. Every human being is vulnerable in one way or another and there are particular vulnerabilities in adolescence. And there are outsized effects associated with those vulnerabilities. Trauma, and I don't necessarily just mean physical or psychological, but trauma of any kind that a young person experiences is going to have an outsized effect long-term in their life. It's critical that we, one, we do no harm. We avoid traumatizing students. I think there are forms of intellectual trauma that we can inflict in unknowing ways to students when we focus more on teaching them to think the way we do, rather than to think critically, because we want to avoid that in ourselves sometimes." He further stated, "I think about this from an admissions perspective too. You and I can predict a student's HSPT [high school entrance exam] score, SAT score, or ACT score based on the income of their parents. Nothing is more predictive than that. So by us requiring a test that has that [premise] baked into it, what are we signaling? The fear-based stress inducing industry of test prep that's surrounding

> it, parents spend thousands of dollars for HSPT prep. Are you kidding me? How is this healthy? How is this good? How is this aiding learning? It just is, it's outrageous.

Ophelia acknowledged all students as poor and vulnerable. She sought social justice by encouraging her students to 'pay forward' the social justice she was modeling. She said:

> Our students are less poor or vulnerable than other schools. Though some of them are poor and all of them (especially those with disabilities) are vulnerable. Being here makes them smarter, kinder, and stronger. I often tell them they are better off than many. They can pay forward what they learn. Anything we do to bring students with disabilities more fully into the learning process is service.

Cynthia echoed Ophelia's opinion that the students at St. Dymphna's were less poor and vulnerable than others. She said,

> Everyone [at St. Dymphna's] has food in their stomachs or has the ability to get food in their stomachs or is able to ask to get food in their stomachs from someone on campus…but everyone knows people struggle with different things. We're here to support each other and help one another.

Other participants shared their thoughts on how they saw accommodating students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable. Sylvia's response was:

> Many of us defined [poverty] as an evil to be eradicated. Vulnerability is something that everyone can experience at all different points in their life. And in many ways, all teenagers are vulnerable for a lot of reasons. So, accommodating students [with disabilities] speaks to that vulnerability. We have to know our students in order to truly meet their needs and ease their way. It doesn't say make their way easy. It doesn't say make things easier. It means eliminate the barriers, the obstacles, so that they can accomplish things on their own to ease their way, not make their way easy. And I think that speaks very well to what our call is to support students with disabilities.

Sarah added to Sylvia's sentiment, saying:

> When you have students, who feel confident about themselves, cared about as part of a community they're going to feel better, they're going to be a contributing positively to the school community, to themselves. I think knowing that they are believed, that they can be successful, and that these supports are not something that makes them stand out or [that they] are something that's unfair or negative, helps them feel good about themselves and, ultimately, I think that helps them not be vulnerable. That confidence, that self-advocacy, you know, that's what we want when they go off to college.

Each of these participants saw accommodating students with disabilities not as a job, but as a call to serve. Each of them echoed aspects of CST and the ethic of care. All of them saw service to students with special needs as a part of creating a more socially just society.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn the methods employed and the extent to which one Catholic high school offered accommodation to students with disabilities in its community. The 12 interviews conducted for this study were designed to answer the three research questions:

1. To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?
2. In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?
3. To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities?

The interview questions were driven by the theoretical framework of CST and of Noddings' (1984) ethic of care. CST contains several mandates for social justice. Theoretically, teachers at a Catholic high school should be engaging tenets such as the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation by accommodating students with disabilities. Ethic of care describes the reciprocal relationship of caregivers and the cared-for. The interview questions asked participants to reflect upon both of these theories.

Several themes emerged in the interview process. Educators at the study site received little or no formal college preparation and infrequent or vague professional development accommodating students with disabilities. Several of the participants acknowledged this fact and were concerned that they were not adequately prepared to accommodate students with disabilities. Participants described accommodation as meeting the needs of the students. They felt compelled to reach their students with disabilities in the manner best suited to the students' needs. This led to the next them, using mixed methods to accommodate their students with special needs. Teachers at St. Dymphna School used multiple teaching strategies to engage their students with disabilities.

The interviews led to a discussion of the fourth and fifth themes: using multiple resources to accommodate students with disabilities and a consideration of the school's resource deficiencies. Teachers used technology, the learning specialist, and a considerable amount of their own time teaching students with disabilities. Participants indicated class sizes, a lack of information about their particular students' disabilities, and a need for more teacher preparation and instruction accommodating students with special needs as resources that were insufficient to fully accommodate students with special needs. Teachers discussed using a variety of grading methods for students with disabilities. These included alternative assessments, altering the degree of difficulty to demonstrate successful completion of rubric items, allowing students multiple attempts to demonstrate learning, and offering extra credit.

Another theme that developed during the interview process was that educators appreciated positive contributions and acknowledged challenges presented by students with disabilities in the classroom. This theme is connected to the discussion of teacher perception of

students with disabilities in the review of the literature. Teachers believed that the presence of students with disabilities in their class forced them to use multiple teaching methods, which in turn led to students with no disability, but who still struggle in school, benefiting from teachers' use of multiple teaching methods they employ for their students with disabilities. Another benefit of students with disabilities in the classroom was that students of all abilities gained increased empathy from their collaboration with students with disabilities. Challenges included an altered class pace, extra time from teachers, and the need for more vigorous classroom management.

The last two themes that emerged from the interviews were teachers called to serve by personal and religious reasons and seeing all students (including students with disabilities) as poor and vulnerable members of the community. Teachers chose to spend their energy and time to accommodate students with disabilities for religious and personal reasons. Outside of the nature of the divine, the two categories were similar in their pursuit of social justice goals of CST. The last theme brought together CST and the ethic of care by asking teachers how they saw accommodating students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable. Teachers defined all of their students, especially those with disabilities, as poor and vulnerable members of the community. The participants saw their charism as service to those who needed additional help in order to bring about a more socially just world.

The next section of this dissertation will contain a deeper analysis of the findings. The researcher will then explore the implications of the findings, specifically how teachers in Catholic high schools should prepared to support students with disabilities and the extent to which Catholic high schools are integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities. The discussion will end with suggestions for further research that may

shed light upon the broader question of the extent to which students with disabilities in Catholic high schools can be effectively accommodated and to increase the degree to which they receive social justice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The study was designed to learn the methods employed and the extent to which one Catholic high school offered accommodation to students with disabilities in its community. The study occurred through a qualitative research design with 12 educational participants who worked in a Catholic high school southern California. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?
2. In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?
3. To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities?

The review of the literature made manifest that, unlike the U.S. public school systems, private religious schools (with some exceptions for those who accepted federal monies as outlined in the literature) were not bound to fully accommodate every student with disabilities who applied for admission. Nor were religious schools forced to offer full accommodation to those students they did accept. These facts did not alter the purpose of the study.

At its core, the purpose of this qualitative study was to hear from educators at one independent Catholic high school in order to learn how they defined accommodations and how they offered those accommodations to students with disabilities. Through semi-structured

interviews, the study gleaned the thoughts and attitudes of Catholic high school educators, in order to gain voices that are missing from the literature. I learned what kinds of learning disabilities educators at the study site felt could be accommodated, and what degree of disability the school was prepared to accommodate. The accommodations offered to those students who were accepted and the steps taken by administration and teachers to accommodate and integrate those students into the student body was also learned.

Throughout the study, I was aware of how my personal experience as a Catholic high school teacher could possibly color the feedback from the participants. It was doubly important for me to be cognizant of my role as researcher since I chose the school where I am conducting research as a study of convenience. It was where I worked. I came into contact with members of the sample group almost daily and faced many of the same challenges they faced regarding students with disabilities. As a faculty member, I retained an insider's position on the faculty portion of the research. In reviewing the data, I found that educators at the study site were neither well trained nor fully supported to accommodate students with disabilities. This does not mean they were not effective teachers, nor does it mean they were totally ineffective supporters of students with disabilities. It simply was fact that professional development and college instruction did not give them all the tools necessary to adequately accommodate students with disabilities. Their professional development was my professional development.

I believe my positionality positively impacted my research because the participants were my coworkers and colleagues. As a trusted and familiar face on campus, I was in a unique position to provide a comfortable and safe environment for participants to share their views and insights. I personally experienced many of the same challenges, opportunities, and moments of

caring that the participants did with their students with disabilities. This led to honest conversations which caused me not to challenge their perceptions, but to use the data to more full answer my research questions.

The Theoretical Framework in the Findings: CST and Ethic of Care

The theoretical framework that guided this study included CST and the ethic of care. These together formed a foundation upon which participants were able to discuss their accommodation of students with disabilities in light of religious social justice doctrine and the care they gave as a reciprocal relationship. The next section includes a discussion of the 11 themes that emerged from the research data. The three research questions will be addressed through a discussion of those themes.

The blueprints upon which my study was framed included CST and ethic of care. I determined that I could find answers to the research questions If I looked at them through the lens of this framework. CST calls upon Catholics to act alongside the oppressed in an effort to end repressive situations and structures (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015). The USCCB identify seven tenets of CST, including three that I felt were of particular relevance to the educational setting of this study: the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation (USCCB, 2005). Ethic of care posits that caring interaction is reciprocal relationship between those caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 2013). According to this ethic of care, educators form relationships with their students wherein the caring (educators) opens themself to the cared-for (students with disabilities) with their full attention (Goldstein, 1998; Noddings, 2013; Pazey, 1993). Ethic of care establishes no specific rules for every situation. Rather, caring is context-specific, rooted in

particular situations and individuals. These theories intersected at the points of motivation (i.e., spiritual, moral, ethical) and praxis (i.e., accommodation practices). Neither framework lists specific instructions applicable to every situation, however CST provides educators with goals, while ethic of care reinforces the principles of effective caring relationships.

The interview questions were derived from the research questions when viewed in light of thie framework. Questions such as "In what ways do you feel compelled to serve students with disabilities?" and "Why did you choose to teach at a Catholic school?" sought to help answer the first research question's fundamental concept of motivation. Elements of both theories were addressed in the second research question; participants were asked to identify practices such as, "What strategies do you use for accommodating students with disabilities?" and "What equitable grading methods do you employ for students with disabilities in inclusive settings?" The third research question, "To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities?" sought to determine the degree to which these two theories were connected. I wanted to discover how intertwined CST and ethic of care were in light of motivation and practice accommodating students with special needs.

Several themes emerged from the research. Elements of CST and ethic of care can be found in many of them. Themes 1 and 2 discussed educators' preparedness accommodating students with disabilities. Inadequate preparation and insufficient professional development, with teachers feeling they learned little that would help them engage better with their students with disabilities, do little to help forward CST and do not bolster an ethic of care, particularly as ethic of care, "requires know-how and judgment" (Tronto, 1998, p. 17). Themes 3 through 7 centered

around the discussion of practice accommodating students with disabilities. There were many times that the mandates of CST and the ethic of care were present as discussed in the findings. Examples such as Ophelia's discussion of "empathy and flexibility always" and Tony's "just putting [learning] within reach [of students with disabilities]" reinforce teachers' willingness, "to have their [students with disabilities'] expressed needs heard and acknowledged" (Noddings, 2005b, p. 148).

Themes 8 through 11 emerged from the discussion of perception and reflection. Participants' reflections like Ophelia's, "When I think of them as kids who need a little more help, it diminishes the idea that they require 'more work,'" mirrored research that educators see themselves as surrogate parents to those in their charge (Lacey, 2000). Lacey said, "The student-teacher relationship plays an important part in the teachers' responses as to why they were in a Catholic school" (Lacey, 2000, p. 8). Sustained discussion of social justice and empathy stemming from the participants' personal and religious calls demonstrate CST and ethic of care intertwining. When the caring is engrossed with the cared-for, seeing and feeling what the cared-for sees and feels, they are more able to give primacy to the goals and needs of the cared-for (Goldstein, 1998).

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study indicated that participants were able to share and discuss the efficacy of their preparation and training teaching students with disabilities. They discussed their definitions of accommodation of students with disabilities and the methods each of them employed in order to engage those students. They had some degree of familiarity with CST and, although they may not have been able to elucidate Noddings' (1984) ethic of care in educational

settings, they demonstrated an understanding of the basic components of care as evidenced through discussions about their interaction with students. The themes are organized according to their categories as laid out in Chapter 4. Themes 1 and 2 are in the category of Preparation. The category of Practice encompasses Themes 3 through 7. Themes 8 and 9 are in the category of Perception, and the final two categories are within the Reflection category.

Theme 1: Receiving Little or No Formal College Preparation Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Legislation such as Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973, the ADA (1990), and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* of 2004 (IDEA), mandate the education of students with special needs in public schools. Catholic schools are not held to these standards. There are exceptions. For example, under the law, Catholic schools who receive federal funding must serve students with disabilities in a regular inclusive classroom environment thorough reasonable accommodation (*Rehabilitation Act* of 1973). Even in the case of this exception, Catholic schools that do accept federal monies must only provide reasonable accommodation (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; LaFee, 2011; Russo et al., 2009). With limited resources, Catholic schools do not offer a large range of services for students diagnosed with special needs (Carlson, 2014).

The first two themes address the first research question, "To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?" Constrained by limited resources and freed from the burden of providing comprehensive accommodation to students with disabilities, Catholic schools are under no obligation to hire and retain educators with the training, knowledge, or credentials to engage students with disabilities. The data of the

study bore this out. None of the participants held a special education credential. At most, participants who received formal college instruction teaching students with disabilities took their courses as part of an overarching matriculation process. The courses they took were limited to one or two for each participant, in order to satisfy graduation requirements. The focus of the courses they took varied from legal responsibilities and educational theory, but with limited praxis. Participants discussed regret that the courses were narrow in focus and scope. There were cases of enthusiasm for the instruction received and regret for the topics that were not covered. One described feeling that she learned little that would help her, as an educator, actually engage with her students with disabilities.

Theme 2: Receiving Infrequent or Vague Professional Development Accommodating Students with Disabilities

The IDEA of 2004 sought to increase the focus on accountability and improved outcomes by emphasizing reading, early intervention, and research-based instruction by requiring that special education teachers be highly qualified. The act also sought to protect the rights of both children with disabilities and their parents (IDEA, 2004). What the act does not do, is require Catholic schools to provide special education services to children with disabilities. Without this requirement, Catholic schools are free to choose the type, focus, and quality of the professional development they offer their faculty and staff.

Professional development can include workshops, seminars, webinars, and other learning experiences that provide teachers opportunities to gain and improve the knowledge and skills important to their positions and job performance. Although educators are required by St. Dymphna's school to engage in various professional development courses during the academic

year, teachers had mixed feelings about the efficacy of the instruction they received. The data indicated that dome of the participants felt there was little new instruction and what was offered was very basic. Some felt the instruction was vague and theoretical, with little effective hands-on instruction. Others commented on the valuable tools and techniques they could use to assist students with disabilities in their classroom. Some remembered receiving instruction from knowledgeable outside sources, while one complained that professional development offered barely scratched the surface of what she needed. Taken as a whole, the data demonstrate professional development that teachers need and want, but that in practice, is of mixed quality. Many teachers reported feeling underqualified to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities (Kiely, 2011). The preparation teachers receive at St. Dymphna's school is consistent with the literature (Fisher, 2013; Rust & Sinelnikov, 2010).

Theme 3: Meeting the Needs of the Students

The second research question asked, "In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?" It sought to explore the extent to which, and the methods employed by educators at St. Dymphna's to engage their students with disabilities. Themes 3 through 7 emerged from this discussion. The interview questions that addressed this question practice asked teachers how they defined accommodations and what current accommodation practices they used (within their definitions). Participants were asked to consider the resources they used and resources they lacked in order to accommodate students with disabilities. Teachers were further asked to discuss what equitable grading methods they used for their students with disabilities. The study participants discussed their definitions of accommodations for students with disabilities.

Most of the participants talked about their personal definitions of accommodations in a general manner, before going into specific accommodations. Teachers felt that there existed a normal classroom experience. Anything outside of what participants considered their normal teaching was considered an accommodation. Participants recognized the need to place learning within the reach of students without compromising the integrity of the course. This desire to meet the needs of students with special needs while maintaining their courses' learning goals was in line with the literature. Catholic high school teachers generally care about the instruction they provide to all of their students, including those students with disabilities under their care (Geanacopoulos, 2001; Kicker & Loadman, 1997; Lacey, 2000).

Theme 4: Using Mixed Methods to Accommodate Students with Disabilities

This theme emerged from the question that asked participants to give examples of accommodation practices they employed in their classes for students with disabilities. They described methods in line with the research regarding the need for teachers of students with disabilities to produce, "content, product, and process due to student needs, readiness, interests, and learning styles" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, p. 15). Participants acknowledged using differentiated teaching methods to reach their students with disabilities. Accommodations such as modifications to curriculum, breaking down of assignments, taking notes for a student, allowing a student to verbally take an assessment rather than a written assessment fall in line with Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2010) findings.

Other methods of instruction for students with disabilities included self-directed learning. In these cases, teachers gave students an assignment that allowed them freedom to complete teacher-set goals by means and methods with which they were most comfortable. The data

revealed that the methods used by educators to accommodate students with disabilities at St. Dymphna were practicing skills outlined by Lake (2019) wherein the most promising schools followed, “three principles: strong, trusting relationships, a problem-solving orientation, and blurred-lines between special and general education” (p. 2) working together in concert.

Theme 5: Using Multiple Resources to Accommodate Students with Disabilities

Participants were asked to discuss what resources they needed to accommodate students with disabilities, both resources they currently employed and those they did not have but felt would enable them to better accommodate those students. The data indicated that educators used assistance from a counselor or the learning specialist, technology, and time. The literature tells us that Catholic schools are doing more to accommodate students with special needs. Catholic schools employ special educators, make use of special educational materials, have smaller classes, use services provided by the local public-school district, and use classroom teacher adjustments (Durow, 2007).

Participants stressed the need to work with academic counselors and the learning specialist to help accommodate students with special needs. The learning specialist at St. Dymphna coordinates accommodation with teachers and students, with input from the school’s academic counselors and the parents of the students. This position is the most analogous St. Dymphna’s has to Durow’s (2007) special educator. Technology includes computers and the software used to enhance education for students. This technology is not dedicated for students with special needs, rather it is used by all students. Participants expressed the need for time to prepare technology, create manageable lesson plans, and engage with their students to meet their

needs. Like other Catholic schools, St. Dymphna's uses services provided by the local public-school district and makes classroom adjustments to instruction.

Theme 6: Considering Current Resource Deficiencies

The literature supports the fact that Catholic schools may also be "limited in their capacity to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners due to an underlying belief on the part of many Catholic educators that children with disabilities would be better served elsewhere" (Moreau et al., 2006, p. 466). According to the data, one of the things St. Dymphna's is missing from Durow's (2007) findings is smaller class sizes. This theme came up often. Teachers complained of not being able to give every student the feedback they needed in a single class session. One teacher complained of not being able to give every student 15 minutes of time in her class of 20 students, needing three or four class periods to get through every student in class. Participants lamented that they were prevented by large class sizes from giving students with disabilities the attention they needed. Educators also lamented that large class sizes prevented them from forming meaningful relationships with their students.

Teachers acknowledged that they were not sufficiently prepared to accommodate all students with disabilities. They discussed the need for further professional development that offered instruction teaching those students. This is line with Boyle and Hernandez's (2016) assertion that Catholic schools identified teachers' lack of experience and training in working with children with disabilities as a major obstacle to accommodating students with special needs.

As to participants' request for more information about the nature of their students' needs and disabilities, Catholic schools have their hands tied by federal law; parents are simply not

required by law to disclose their child's disability (IDEA, 2004). It may require building greater trust and education in order to convince more parents to share their child's disability.

Theme 7: Using a Variety of Grading Methods for Students with Disabilities

The last theme that emerged from the category of practice was grading methods employed by teachers for their students with disabilities. Teachers indicated alternative assessments, altering the degree of difficulty to demonstrate successful completion of rubric items, allowing students multiple attempts to demonstrate learning, and offering extra credit as alternative grading methods they used for their students with disabilities. Some participants stated they employed some of these grading methods for all of their students, regardless of disability.

The goal for many participants was for students with disability to use a variety of assessment that best fit with their abilities. They often adjusted the way they assessed learning. Some stressed the fact that students learn differently and may need to be assessed differently. The literature agrees with this assessment, emphasizing the need to produce content, product, and process due to student needs, readiness, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson, 2014). Participants were clear that the any accommodation or differentiation should be designed with one goal in mind: let the student demonstrate what they have learned.

Theme 8: Appreciating Positive Contributions Presented by Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

Themes 8 and 9 stemmed from the perception of students with disabilities in the classroom. Part of this study was to determine perceptions of teachers at a Catholic high school toward their students with disabilities. Participants in this study were asked how students with

disabilities impacted their classes. Participants indicated both positive impacts on the class environment and challenges as well. Participants found that students with no disability, but who still struggle in school, benefited from teachers' use of the multiple teaching methods they employ for their students with disabilities. Participants gave examples: students with disabilities empowered other students to be more engaged in class, practices, methods, and techniques needed to reach students with disabilities help ensure that all students were engaged in deeper learning. Some teachers believed that having students with disabilities in the classroom positively impacted the learning environment by making them better teachers. Teachers used multiple teaching methods, thus reaching students who, although having no disabilities, benefitted from alternative learning strategies. This was corroborated by the literature, for example, Gardner's (1983) eight different types of intelligence including interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Participants believed that students gained increased empathy for students with disabilities by working with them in collaborative classroom settings. Students without disabilities benefited from the presence of students with disabilities. They obtained a new perspective of learning; participants feeling that students without disabilities became more emotionally mature and empathetic due to their interaction with students with disabilities.

Theme 9: Acknowledging Challenges Presented by Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

Teachers felt that there were also challenges presented by students with disabilities in the classroom. Among these were, extra time from teachers, and the need for more vigorous classroom management. Time was a resource in short supply for most teachers in the study. They

conveyed that every accommodation, special lesson plan, one-on-one tutoring, and adjustment to the curriculum required more time on their part. Although the learning specialist was there to advise, participants indicated they had to make all of these adjustments themselves. This mirrors studies that found very little assistance offered to teachers by Catholic schools to help them accommodate students with special needs (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016; Ee et al., 2018; Moreau et al., 2006). Participants also stated that students with disabilities sometimes slowed instruction, holding back the pace of the class. This paralleled Bulgren et al. (2006) who found that teachers feel their students with disabilities are less capable. There was concern among participants that mixed classrooms increased tension among students and teachers.

Theme 10: Called to Serve by Personal and Religious Reasons

The last two themes emerged from the discussion centering around the final research question: To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the ethic of care in their support for students with disabilities? Teachers were asked to reflect upon why they chose to teach students with disabilities in a Catholic school. This theme forced me to reflect as well. The responses from the participants reflect the research (Benson & Guerra, 1985; Geanacopoulos, 2001; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Shared attitudes, values, and beliefs of the members of a school's lay faculty enhance the development of the school community (Lacey, 2000).

For some, religion was a strong motivator. Participants saw themselves following the example of Jesus Christ when he ministered to the poor. Educators mentioned other themes of social justice. Serving the poor and vulnerable, being on the front lines helping anybody and everybody were reasons given for working in a Catholic school. Participants who were not

Catholic also mentioned the social justice elements of their faiths. The Hebrew phrase *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) was given as a reason for choosing to work at a Catholic school seeking social justice.

Personal reasons participants gave for choosing to accommodate students with disabilities included having family with disabilities, personal learning experience, and issues of empathy. Participants empathized with their relatives, neighbors, and family. They saw how classmates struggled in school and empathized with their pain, vowing to help students like them in their own vocation. Others saw in their college learning how students with disabilities had to work hard and needed the assistance of caring professionals. Empathy seemed to come to the fore in the data; it is what drove many of the participants to teach students with disabilities.

Theme 11: Seeing all Students (Including Students with Disabilities) as Poor and Vulnerable Members of the Community

The last theme connects not only to the third research question but is intertwined with the theoretical framework of CST and ethic of care. The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation are three tenets of CST closely tied to topic of this study. Participants were asked how they saw accommodating St. Dymphna's community of students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable. In the ethic of care's reciprocal relationship of caring, the caring opens herself to the cared-for with her full attention (Goldstein, 1998; Noddings, 1984; 2013). This mirrors what participants conveyed about their view of accommodating student with disabilities as service to the poor and vulnerable members of the community.

Participants connoted poor with poor in spirit, comfort, support, etc. Specific examples included descriptions of disabilities: inability to focus, difficulty processing information, and the fear that accompanies those disabilities. An excellent example of the connection between accommodating students with disabilities and serving the poor and vulnerable may be found in the quote from Ophelia:

> Our students are less poor or vulnerable than other schools. Though some of them are poor and all of them (especially those with disabilities) are vulnerable. Being here makes them smarter, kinder, and stronger. I often tell them they are better off than many. They can pay forward what they learn. Anything we do to bring students with disabilities more fully into the learning process is service.

This quote includes CST and the ethic of care in its description of students with disabilities as poor and vulnerable and the concept of paying forward what they learn (reciprocity), leading the march for social justice and a better world.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This section discusses the limitations and delimitations of this study. Limitations included the limited size and scope of the study as well as the small sample size. Delimitations included a discussion of the parameters of the study site and the size of the participant pool.

Limitations

One Catholic high school, during one point in time, in a limited study cannot answer every question there may be regarding accommodating students with disabilities. Limitations to this study included the size of the sample, which was one school in southern California. It would be very challenging to say whether this one school was representative of many Catholic schools in the country. Finally, the sample size of 12 teachers and administrators may not be representative of every opinion within the school site.

Delimitations

This study was limited only to faculty and administration of one Catholic high school in southern California, during one school year. I was able to interview four administrators and eight faculty members regarding the degree to which they welcome students with disabilities, their ability to accommodate them, and the methods they use to engage students with disabilities.

Implications

In this study, I sought to find answers to three research questions related to how educators at a Catholic high school accommodate students with disabilities. A review of the literature and the research interviews offered several themes that may offer insight and guidance for future action for Catholic high schools wishing to broaden their accommodation of students with disabilities. In this section, I discuss some of the study's implications for practice, affecting Catholic high school administrators and teachers.

Implications for Catholic High School Administrators

This study offers several conclusions that may be of use to Catholic high school administrators. Catholic high school administrators must be cognizant of disability laws that may affect them, and the consequences of failing to follow them. Administrators facing the prospect of dwindling Catholic high school enrollment should consider increasing accommodations they offer to students with disabilities. Another reason for administrators to consider offering greater accommodation for students with disabilities are the precepts of CST. Administrators that currently offer, plan to offer, or plan to increase their accommodations for students with special needs must increase support and training for their teachers.

Although Catholic high schools are exempt from following many of the laws applying to students with disabilities, there are instances where they may find their school in jeopardy due to assumptions about whether a law applies to them. Under Section 504, most Catholic schools and virtually all Diocesan Catholic schools are legally obligated to accommodate students with special needs if the schools are recipients of Federal monies (*Rehabilitation Act*, 1973; Scanlan, 2009). Under the ADA (1990), all schools are required to make accommodations for students with special needs, in similar fashion as Section 504 (Motwani, 2001). Even if a school is unable to reasonably accommodate a student with special needs (an exemption from Section 504), it cannot include admissions policies that do not screen out or tend to screen out persons with disabilities, changes in policies, practices, or procedures, provision of auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication, and removal of physical barriers in existing program facilities (ADA,1990). Clearly, Catholic high school leadership should be cognizant of current law.

The research tells us that students with developmental disabilities rarely attend Catholic schools (Burke & Griffin, 2016). Only 5.6% of Catholic schools served students with moderate/severe disabilities (Bello, 2006). When Catholic high school principals identified the types of instructional services provided to students with disabilities enrolled in their schools, 8.6% reported that no additional services were available for students with disabilities at their schools (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). The research also has stated that Catholic school enrollment numbers are dwindling, and many Catholic schools are closing (NCEA, 2018). In light of these statistics, Catholic high school administrators should do what they can to open their doors to students with disabilities. Doing so may increase the number of siblings of students with special

needs, who can now attend the same school as their brother or sister. Offering greater accommodations to students with disabilities special needs may also increase the success of the school through the benefits offered by students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

Catholic high school leaders should look into building schoolwide policies and structures for special education. Accommodation practices for students with disabilities will remain haphazard and mildly effective at best without clear guidance from the school. The more a school can do to reduce confusion and ambiguity in its policies, the better it will be for parents, students, and teachers. Teachers need to know what is expected from them in the classroom and where they should turn for help and situational assistance. Parents and teachers will benefit from clear policies governing recruitment, orientation, and ongoing student support.

Administrators must work to create and encourage an atmosphere of trust and respect for parents and their students with disabilities. Removing the stigma associated with learning disabilities. Participants in this study spoke of parents who refused to have their students tested for learning disabilities, fearing they would be refused admittance or would be treated differently. They discussed parents whose culture saw any disability as something of which to be personally ashamed, who were embarrassed to admit their students' needs. The law is clear: parents do not need to accept testing for their students or reveal a diagnosis. Teachers spoke often of children who are not identified and, therefore, were only informally receiving support. They related their frustration not knowing which students needed special accommodation or learning only months into the school year what kind of help would best support some of their students. Without a legal mandate, it is up to administration to create stronger relationships with

their families, so that parents will willingly (better eagerly) take any steps necessary to better their children's education.

Administrators should strongly consider the precepts of CST when considering whether or not to offer greater accommodations to students with disabilities. The very nature of their Catholic identity should compel Catholic high school to increase their capacity to assist students with disabilities. The calls to serve the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the life and dignity of human persons, and the call to family, community, and participation are closely intertwined with the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church, and Catholic identity. Catholic high school leaders can only strengthen their community's commitment to greater accommodation by embracing the tenets of CST. It is who they are.

The research revealed a strong need for training, education, and support from administrators for their teachers who must engage with students with disabilities. The research bears this out. Teachers who believed that they had support for inclusion in their schools had more positive beliefs about inclusion (Stidham-Smith, 2013). Many teachers reported feeling underqualified to successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities (Kiely, 2011). Participants perceived professional development offered by the school as vague and infrequent. Without proper preparation, teachers will not have confidence in their ability to successfully accommodate students with disabilities. Administration members must have the training necessary to train others. Administrators concerned with improving accommodation should seek out professional development opportunities that are focused and practical.

Implications for Catholic High School Teachers

Teachers in this study demonstrated they are caring, professional, and adaptive educators who see accommodating students with disabilities as furthering the call to a socially just world. Having said that, there emerged implications for the future success of Catholic high school educators who teach students with disabilities: flexibility and training.

Successful teachers must be flexible. They must engage students with lessons that embrace as many of the eight different types of intelligences they can. Students exhibit different intelligences: musical, visual, verbal, logical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 1983). Educators should practice personalization of learning, the idea that learning should be customized for each student's unique ability and interests.

> Personalization of learning takes the classroom away from a "one-size-fits-all" strategy to allow for truly individualized instruction. Examples of components that comprise the Personalization of learning element include "teacher differentiation of instruction based on learning needs," "flexible schedule," and "student autonomy." (LaForce et al., 2016, p. 7)

This flexibility also extends to different facets of accommodating students with disabilities. Successful teachers must practice effective classroom management, offer tutoring, work with students in small groups and create alternative assignments and assessments.

These practices are not magically intrinsic to teachers. They must be learned. The pace of research in the field of disability education is such that best practices change often. Teachers should avail themselves to professional development including instruction offered by their

school of employment and additional support: online classes, college courses, professional learning committees, seminars and workshops.

Future Research

Explore Catholic high schools that attempt greater accommodation of students with disabilities.

Future research should be done to gauge the success of Catholic high schools that decide to increase the accommodations they offer to students with disabilities. It would be of benefit to the field to know if they increased enrollment, put together a strong team, brought in necessary training, offered excellent support to teachers, and how they obtained funding to make the necessary changes.

Seek out best practices for private school teachers with no special education training who must accommodate students with disabilities.

The research and this study concluded that teachers feel underprepared to teach students with disabilities. The more training that they have, the more empowered they will become; they will be better able to adapt, assist, create, and encourage plans for best learning. Since many teachers rely upon professional development training for their continued education, it is vital that research is made into which practices will be most effective and conducive to better teaching.

Continue research into Catholic high school accommodations of students with disabilities.

The literature on accommodation of students with disabilities was vast. For private schools, it was smaller. For Catholic schools it was small. For Catholic high schools it was sparse at best. This study only scratches at the surface of what Catholic high schools are doing, can be doing, and should be doing to accommodate students with disabilities. Of particular

interest would be research that observes approaches and methods of teachers' accommodations of students with disabilities in the classroom. It is possible that such a study could help administrators and teachers adjust their practices to improve learning. Additional research should be done exploring the attitudes and perceptions of the parents of students with disabilities. Their insight could inform Catholic schools about what it is their community (or, in economic terms, their clients) want and expect for their children from Catholic high schools. The implications are huge as Catholic schools hold a tradition of historical importance to their communities and still act as places of formation for members of the Church and those who respect those values. Even as Catholic high school enrollment dwindles, it is incumbent upon them to lead by example, embracing the tenets of CST.

Consider implementing an improvement science approach.

Institutional change can be a daunting and difficult proposition for Catholic high schools seeking to improve their accommodation of students with disabilities. I recommend Catholic high school administrators investigate engaging in improvement science research. Improvement science, "deploys rapid tests of change to guide the development, revision and continued fine-tuning of new tools, processes, work roles and relationships" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2020, para. 1). Unlike translational science or evidence-based practice, an improvement science approach, "allows a broad scope of scientific study about which improvement strategies work best" in complex adaptive systems (Improvement Science Research Network, 2020, para. 2). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2020) supported deploying, "rapid tests of change to guide the development, revision and continued fine-tuning of new tools, processes, work roles and relationships" (para. 1).

The process is designed to be hands-on, requiring stakeholders to embark upon a journey of continuous improvement to develop the necessary knowledge to implement educational change faster and more effectively. In improvement science, the best way to organize improvement efforts is through networked improvement communities, wherein change is derived through the experience, expertise, and passion of intentionally assembled stakeholders working together with a common problem-solving focus. Through focus, an understanding of the problem, and willingness to develop, test, and refine interventions, a networked improvement community may increase and integrate best practices accommodating St. Dymphna's students with disabilities. The community must combine research, consensus, experimentation, and assessment to enable institutional change. The goal and the work are intertwined in an unending search for continuous improvement. There is no one-size-fits-all easy fix.

Expand research of professional development on the topic of caring to Catholic high schools.

The findings of this study indicated a large degree of empathy and caring among educators. However, it is clear that teachers do not share concepts of caring to the exact same degree. Caring educators are paramount to student success; Catholic school educators could benefit from professional development designed to increase their awareness of the process of care in which they engage. Watts (2018) created a professional development module to train educators to "reflect on their personal practices and how [those practices] might change as a result of the data" (p. 165). Although this module was specific to students with special needs in non-public schools, research should be conducted to determine the extent to which this training could be adapted for use in Catholic high schools.

Conclusion

I entered this study with only my experience as a Catholic high school teacher informing my thoughts about the current state of accommodation of students with disabilities. In some ways, my research agreed with my thoughts. Catholic high schools in general fell short of the mandates of CST to serve the poor and vulnerable, respect the life and dignity of human persons, and answer the call to family, community, and participation. I recall another school where I taught that had a family with seven children. Three of the children displayed no signs of disability, one displayed mild autism, and three were severely handicapped. They did not have full use of their limbs and suffered mental disabilities. The school where I worked could not accommodate them. I remember when dad would come to pick up the kids who went to my school, the severely disabled children who were already in the van looked at the school scene around them with wonder. It nearly broke my heart.

Moving forward from that experience to my current experience, I still believed that there was simply very little that Catholic high schools could do for students with disabilities. Mild disabilities, mild adjustments, and a little extra time was all the school could provide. The research opened my eyes to schools like Paul VI, CJHS, and CCHS that offered programs and accommodations rivaling public schools. Furthermore, they offered these accommodations in an environment of faith, love, and community. I believe that it is difficult for Catholic high schools to offer greater accommodation. But it must be done. The literature was clear that Catholic schools need to reverse the trends of declining enrollment and shuttering schools. As they try to attract more students, they are going to have to make themselves available to students with special needs. Physical and financial sources must be created, teachers must be trained, and

administrators must actively create structures of support to keep inclusion alive. I believe change will take time, resources, and careful planning; it will not be overnight. I refuse to believe (and the literature bore this out) that it is impossible. It can be done. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” (Mark 10:14, Catholic Online Bible, 2020). Who am I to argue with Him?

EPILOGUE

This study took me on a journey that was at times disheartening and at other times heartwarming. The fact that the overwhelming majority of Catholic schools do little to accommodate students with moderate to severe disabilities flew in the face of CST and the ethic of care. Unfortunately, St. Dymphna’s accommodations for students with disabilities fell into this category; the school accommodated students with only minor learning disabilities. Fear and anxiety clouded the confidence of the participants to engage their students with disabilities. Themes of inadequate training and a lack of clear direction appeared often in the literature. None of the teachers at the site held a special education credential and only half indicated they had any formal training accommodating students with disabilities. Participants complained of a lack of resources to effectively engage their students with disabilities. Teachers also discussed the challenges their students with disabilities presented in their classrooms. Together, these findings made for a disappointing state of affairs.

On the other hand, there was much here that bolstered my confidence in me and my fellow teachers. Every participant made manifest their desire to make a difference in the lives of their students. Real caring was evident in their modifications to curriculum, assessment, and practices teaching their students with disabilities. There were many examples of teachers giving

their time and compassion to help their students. Although there were challenges, teachers spoke of how students with disabilities in the classroom lessened the fear of failure in the classroom, allowing students of all abilities a fuller, better learning experience. Teachers even discussed how sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities made them better, stronger, more conscientious educators. The pervasive atmosphere of genuine care evidenced by participant responses resonated with me, reaffirming my confidence in my own teaching and making me even more proud to be affiliated with this organization and the professionalism, care, and humanity of my fellow teachers.

The stories from the participants about their calls to serve their students caused the participants to reflect upon where they were as teachers. Many of them actually thanked *me* (when I was privileged to have them partake in this study) for allowing them to raise their own consciousness and to unburden themselves of some of the issues that they had not even realized were weighing heavily upon their chests. This study allowed me to reflect upon my own journey as a teacher. Being a product of Catholic education, believing that every student should have a real chance at learning, and being a parent resonated with me. These facets were very real to me. Seeing students with disabilities as poor and vulnerable members of the community was something that I recognized but the meaning of which I have had to allow to grow over the years. I have always understood and accepted the words, but experience, introspection, and perhaps this study, caused these ideas to become more real to me and taken on greater urgency. Teens are definitely poor and vulnerable members of the community, regardless of their parents' financial wealth. Teens with learning disabilities are even more vulnerable. The good news is that the participants of this study and I recognize the work we have in front of us. As Sylvia said,

Serving them is our mission. It's the mission of a teacher; it's what we're here for, for those kids who need our help.

APPENDIX A

Loyola Marymount University
Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs, or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Let the Children Come to Me: Accommodating and Embracing Catholic High School Students with Disabilities.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. By way of reminder, its purpose is to listen to the voices of educators at a Catholic high school in light of their experiences with students with disabilities in their educational institution to better understand how they accommodate students with disabilities and to make recommendations as to how best meet the needs of the educators and these students. Your confidentiality and anonymity are protected. Our interviews are anonymous and confidential. For our first interview, I will use a pseudonym. Is there a particular pseudonym you would like me to use? In our subsequent interviews, I will continue to use that same pseudonym.

During the interview, let me know if you are tired and need to take a break. The interview questions act as a guide; I may ask additional questions during our interview to make sure I understand and to explore tangents related to the research.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview - Research Question 1 - To what extent are teachers at a private Catholic high school prepared to support students with disabilities?

1.How long have you been an educator?

2. What is your highest degree?

3. Have you had any instruction teaching students with disabilities?
4. Do you hold a special education credential?
5. Why did you choose to teach/work at a Catholic school?
6. What preparation or instruction have received from administration and counseling to help you prepare to support students with disabilities?

Interview – Research Question 2 - In what ways are teachers at a private Catholic high school supporting students with disabilities?

1. How do you define accommodations?
2. What resources do you need to allow you to accommodate students with disabilities?
3. What equitable grading methods do you employ for students with disabilities in inclusive settings?
4. How do students with disabilities impact the atmosphere of your classroom?

Interview - Research Question 3 - To what extent are teachers and administrators at a private Catholic high school integrating CST and the Ethic of Care in their support for students with disabilities?

1. In what ways do you feel compelled to serve students with disabilities?
2. How have your views, opinions on inclusion been influenced by personal experience? Professional experience? Colleagues? Leadership? Religious beliefs?
3. How do you see accommodating students with disabilities as serving the poor and vulnerable?

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