Digital Commons@
Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations

2021

Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome

Christina Arellano
Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd

 Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation

Arellano, Christina, "Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome" (2021). *LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations*. 1082.
https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd/1082

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Digital Commons@
Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations

2021

Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome

Christina Arellano
Loyola Marymount University, carellano@la-archdiocese.org

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd

 Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation

Arellano, Christina, "Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome" (2021). *LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations*. 1082.
https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd/1082

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome

By

Christina Arellano

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education

Loyola Marymount University

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2021

Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students With Down Syndrome

Copyright © 2021

By

Christina Arellano

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Christina Arellano, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

3.24.21
Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Lauren Casella (Mar 24, 2021 12:37 PDT)
Lauren Casella, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

[redacted]
Mar 19, 2021 17:01 PDT)
Kevin Baxter, Ed.D., Committee Member

Jill Bickett
Jill Bickett (Mar 19, 2021 17:31 PDT)
Jill Bickett, Ed.D., Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for being part of the vibrant history of Catholic schools and for the opportunity of building its fully inclusive future.

My heartfelt gratitude to my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Lauren Casella, for her expert guidance, constant encouragement, and undivided attention despite her very demanding schedule. Without her pursuit for excellence in research and kind but firm manner I would never have completed this work and overcome the challenges this pandemic presented. Thank you, Dr. Casella, we will one day aim for "meaningful brevity."

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Jill Bickett and Dr. Kevin Baxter. Dr. Bickett, thank you for welcoming me to the doctoral program and encouraging me to pursue my dream of serving the most vulnerable in our Catholic school communities. Thank you for your keen eye to detail and for always supporting women in the program who were holding careers and were also raising families. Thank you, Dr. Baxter, for your leadership in Catholic schools and for accepting to participate on my dissertation committee. Your passion for Catholic education and your constant challenge of the status quo allowed me to push my own boundaries and ask the tough questions.

A very special and heartfelt thanks to Dr. Anthony Sabatino. May his soul rest in peace. Dr. Sabatino introduced me to the charism of the Jesuits and pursue knowledge for the betterment of children beyond my school grounds.

Special gratitude to my editor, Ardell. Thank you for your patience with my relentless requests and time restrained expectations. You have been so gracious.

Thank you, Cohort 15, and a special mention to Csilla. Your tenacity and steadfastness encouraged me to show up as my best and you were so kind even when I was not, and for that, thank you.

Thank you to my grandparents, Avita and Richard, who continue to watch over me from heaven. I have always felt your loving gaze and know that my work has been blessed because of you.

Thank you to my children Elijah, Ria, and Alex. I will always be sorry for missing the many outings, weekends, and events that were special to you. But your notes of encouragement and text messages during class always kept me going.

And finally, I am most grateful to you, Tonya. Without you none of this would be possible. Your endless support, love, and care for our family, and unselfish dedication to my work and study has allowed me to achieve all my dreams. Thank you for our hours of conversation on social justice and the blueprints of change for the landscape of our schools.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and dissertation to all the children with Down Syndrome who passed our doors, and those yet to come. May you always find a welcoming place in Catholic schools. We hope you give us a chance to right the wrongs, to hold your hand and a be a friend, again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **iii**
DEDICATION ..... **v**
LIST OF TABLES ..... **ix**
ABSTRACT ..... **x**

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF STUDY **1**
Tenets of Catholic Education 2
Definition of Inclusion 4
Benefits of an Inclusive Education for Students With Disabilities 5
Inclusion in Catholic Schools 6
Problem Statement 7
Research Questions 9
Purpose and Significance 9
Theoretical Framework 10
Method and Design 10
Conclusion 11

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW **12**
Catholic Education 12
Mission and Values of Catholic Education 12
Catholic Social Teaching 15
Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools 18
Sense of Community 18
Culture of Caring 20
Opportunity for Full Inclusion of SWD 21
Inclusion 22
National State of Inclusion 22
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 22
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Catholic Schools 23
State of Inclusion in Catholic Schools 26
The Church's Response to Inclusion 26
Response to Inclusion in the Catholic School Community 26
Catholic Schools' Response to Inclusion 27
Inclusive Practices in Catholic Schools 28
Data on SWD in Catholic Schools 29
Progress in Serving SWD in Catholic Schools 30
Challenges in Serving SWD at Catholic Schools 32
Principal and Teacher Attitude Toward Inclusion 34
Limited Resources 36
Limited Formal Training and Professional Development Opportunities 40
The Future for Catholic Schools in Their Service to SWD 41
Down Syndrome 44

Definition of Down Syndrome 44
Symptoms of Children with Down Syndrome 45
Intellectual Development of Children with Down Syndrome 46
Inclusion of Children with Down Syndrome in General Education Settings 46
Benefits of Inclusion of Students With Down Syndrome 50
Benefits of Inclusion to Students Without Disabilities 51

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 54
Research Questions 55
Research Purpose 55
Qualitative Case Study Research: Rationale 56
Case Study Methodology: Rationale 57
Setting: St. Marian Catholic Elementary School 58
Participants and Selection Criteria 58
Data Collection Methods 59
Semi-structured Interviews 59
Quality of Questions 61
Document Analysis 61
Instruments 62
Transcriptions 62
Data Disposal and Destruction 63
Positionality and Reflexivity: Role as Principal Researcher 63
Research Study Procedures 65
Research Study Procedures 65
Trustworthiness 66
Data Analysis Procedures 68
Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Case Study Research 68
Data Analysis 68
List of Codes 70
Coding and Memo Process 74
Credibility 74
Transferability 75
Confirmability 75
Participants 75
Ethical Considerations 77
Confidentiality 78
Summary 79

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 80
Restatement of Research Questions 81
How the Study Was Conducted 81
Data Gathering 82
Data Explication 82
Emerging Themes of the Research 83

Developing a Shared Framework 83
Focusing on a Shared Mission....84
Focusing on a Unified Vernacular....87
Guidance and Support Provided by a Servant Leader....95
Developing a Mission Aligned With the Catholic Social Teachings....97
Instituting a Culture of Collaboration....103
Support Provided by Parents 109
Developing a Common Ground for Collaboration That Benefits All Students 111
Providing Inclusive Supports and Opportunities....120
Liaison With External Organizations 122
Making Minor Accommodations and Adjustments by Employing the STEP Program and UDL 124
Measuring Success Beyond the Mastery of Academic Standards and Benchmarks.126
Discussion of Research Question 1 128
Discussion of Research Question 2 130
Limited Financial Resources 131
Continued Professional Development Opportunities 134
Facing the Challenges at St. Marian....138
Advocacy and the Continuation of Care in Catholic Schools 139
Summary for Research Question 2....144
Summary....145

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS 146
Restatement of Purpose of the Study....147
Restatement of Research Questions 148
Summary of the Findings 148
Responses to Frequently Asked Questions....155
Implications for Practice and Policy....159
Establish a System-wide Expectation of Inclusion 160
Build Systems of Data Collection 160
Identify Model Inclusive Schools for the Purpose of Training and Observation....161
Provide Educators with a Robust in-service Preparation on Inclusive Education 162
Promote and Celebrate Inclusivity 164
Recommendation for Future Studies 166
Conclusion....167

APPENDIX A....169
APPENDIX B....170
APPENDIX C....171
APPENDIX D....173
REFERENCES 174

LIST OF TABLES

Table **Page**

1. Participant Description 77

2. Implications for Practice and Policy 165

ABSTRACT

Dispelling the Myth: A Case Study on How a Catholic Elementary School Serves Students with Down Syndrome

By

Christina Arellano

Although called by our vocation and the mission of Catholic schools, students with disabilities (SWD) are underserved in Catholic education. Only approximately 1% of the nation's SWD population (67,000 students) attend private schools with 40% identified as Catholic (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). Despite the small number, SWD and peers that struggle are attending our schools and therefore, must be included meaningfully and served successfully. This study dispels the myths around the admission and service of students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools and informs educational leaders on how to create and sustain inclusive environments aligned with Catholic Social Teachings.

A qualitative research approach comprising semi-structured interviews and document review was used in the study. The framework of Catholic social teachings and the epistemology of inclusivity were used to get answers to the two research questions: (a) how does a Catholic elementary school serve students with Down syndrome? and (b) What are the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school?

The significance of this case study lies in witnessing and documenting one elementary Catholic school's experience of creating, developing, establishing, and modeling an inclusion environment that serves the needs of its students with Down syndrome. This study ultimately

provides data to those in similar Catholic school settings in developing and implementing fully inclusive environments. This study further expands the discussion in the field of Catholic education about the right(s) of all Catholic children, especially students with Down syndrome.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

All children have God-given potential and human dignity, for they are made in His image. Catholic Social Teachings are clear about this assertion, and they implore us to reach out to the marginalized and most vulnerable and open our Catholic school doors so that every child has a seat at the table. Catholic schools are called to serve all of God's children, including students with disabilities who require and benefit from inclusive practices. Inclusionary practices align with Catholic Social Teaching (CST), Catholic identity, and the mission of the Catholic schools. Catholic schools have had a rich history of effectively serving students who suffer from a variety of social injustices, such as poverty, segregation, and racism (Bryk et al., 1993); however, historically our schools have provided a narrow gate through which students with disabilities have not been consistently welcomed to enter, especially students with Down syndrome.

Since the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) renewed its public commitment to making Catholic schools fully inclusive (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1998a), the Department of Catholic Schools under the auspices of the archdiocese encouraged inclusive education at its parish school sites. In 2009, it created a Support Team Education Plan (STEP) and Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) guidelines that would act as a support for Catholic school principals and educators to create inclusive classrooms in their parish schools (USCCB, 2011). Even though this was a step towards a renewed commitment, it also allowed schools to close their doors to students like Myra. The verbiage in the policy that schools would serve

students “whenever possible” provided an exit strategy for schools that did not want to address the challenges of serving students with a severity of special needs.

The significance of this study lay in documenting a Catholic school’s experience of creating, developing, and establishing a model of an inclusion program in one large west coast archdiocese. This study hoped to further the discussion in the field of Catholic education about the right(s) of all Catholic children, especially students with Down syndrome. This right to education for all is based on the tenets of Catholic education wherein education is a matter of human dignity that all children regardless of their ability receive a spiritual and emotional education as well as one that is appropriately academic.

Tenets of Catholic Education

The tenets of the Catholic faith embrace the idea of inclusion of students with disabilities in Catholic schools. From Catholic social teaching to the model of Jesus as teacher in scripture, the foundation for inclusion was made clear (Bonfiglio & Kroh, 2020). Inclusion requires a culture of all is welcome. However, it is more than a willingness to open the doors; it is the willingness to provide everyone a seat at the table.

The birth of Catholic schools in the United States was a response to the experience of a mostly urban immigrant Catholic community beginning in the mid-19th century. The experience of this community was characterized mostly by a sense of social unwelcome and cultural marginalization and resulted in the need to create a set of schools where religiously marginalized Catholic could live and teach their faith (McGreevy, 2003). The main elements of Catholic education were defined to include the capability of Catholic schools to accommodate educational change, adapt to new pedagogical styles, focus on infusing the Gospel message in all settings,

and accept a culture with a plurality of perspectives (Martin & Litton, 2004). From their foundation, Catholic schools were dedicated to teaching the poor and ethnic immigrant groups. As Brady (2008) observed in considering appropriate responses to societal problems, "Catholics have formed parallel institutions that provide services that advocate for the poor or marginalized in society" (pp. 44-45). In his apostolic letter (Paul VI, 1971) issued a call to action in which he stated, "It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action" (p.48). Pope Paul VI directed the readers to respond to the need in all persons for equality and participation as expressions of God-given human dignity and freedom (Paul VI, 1971).

Research showed that Catholic schools provided a better education to minority and at-risk students than public schools and were founded on the tradition of educating poor and marginalized children (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bryk et al., 1993; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 2002; Youniss & Convey, 2000). Further research indicated that it is the capability of the Catholic school system to form a sense of community that makes the difference for students from disadvantaged communities. Ouchi (2008) stated that Catholic education's commitment to the idea of school as a community has made a key difference in educating all students, which is a finding supported by previous research (Bryk et al., 1993). Ouchi (2008) further found that the most successful schools were those with a strong entrepreneurial principal, where financial and educational decisions were controlled locally, where teachers and principals were accountable for performance, where decision-making was decentralized, and where student achievement of

all students regardless of their ability was its imperative goal. He found that these were the key attributes of the Catholic school structure that allowed for the success of all its students.

In 2012, The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), endorsed by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), recognized being "Accessible to all students" as a defining characteristic of a Catholic school: Catholic schools "should do everything in their power to manage available resources and seek innovative options to ensure that Catholic school education is geographically, programmatically, physically, and financially accessible" (p. 3). Moreover, Francis (2016) has written that full inclusion must be thought of comprehensively:

> [It] calls for not only specific techniques and programs, but it requires first of all that each face be recognized and accepted, with the tenacious and patient certainty that every person is unique and unrepeatable, and that every excluded face is an impoverishment of the community. (as cited in Faggella-Luby & Engel, 2020, p. 33)

Definition of Inclusion

Across the globe, schools are increasingly encouraged to educate students with disabilities (SWD) alongside their non-disabled peers in a practice known as inclusion. Inclusion has been defined as involving a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision that would provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that would best correspond to their requirements and preferences (World Health Organization, 2011).

Prevailing definitions of inclusive education have replaced the appropriate placement focus of a SWD to a more comprehensive description that has instead focused on a range of placements and meaningful participation in curricula and activities that have an emphasis on student outcomes (Kurth et al., 2017). The process of delivering services and including students in the general education setting has been attributed to a philosophy that affirms inclusion as SWDs being accepted, respected, and valued members of the community (Friend & Bursuck, 2006) and afforded the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers (Amado et al., 2013; McLeskey et al., 2014; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2017). The Office of Special Education Programs (2015) defined inclusion as including children with disabilities in general early childhood programs being together with their peers without disabilities and having high expectations while participation was intentionally promoted in all learning and social activities, which was to be facilitated by individualized accommodations using evidence-based services and supports to foster development of friendship with peers and a sense of belonging.

Inclusion is markedly introduced in several international declarations, laws, and education policies. These policies, along with the ceaseless efforts of advocates for the rights of children with disabilities, have led to a substantial increase in the number of SWD who are served alongside non-disabled students. There has been clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings confer substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities (Boyle, 2017).

Benefits of an Inclusive Education for Students With Disabilities

A large body of research indicated that included students develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics, have higher rates of attendance, were less likely to have behavioral

problems, and were more likely to complete secondary school than students who had not been included. These results percolated further into the children's adulthood and resulted in children becoming independent and active members of society (Baker et al., 1995). There was strong evidence that SWD benefit academically from inclusive education. The academic impacts of inclusion have been studied in many ways with many different populations of students around the world. Multiple systematic reviews of the scholarly research literature indicated that SWD who were educated in general education classes academically outperform their peers who had been educated in segregated settings (Katz & Mirenda, 2002).

Including SWD also supported improvements in teaching practice that benefited all students. Effectively including a student with a disability requires teachers and school administrators to develop capacities to support the individual strengths and needs of every student, not just those SWD. Non-disabled students educated in inclusive classrooms have been shown to hold less prejudicial views and to become more accepting of people who are different from themselves, and in most cases, being educated alongside a student with a disability has not lead to adverse effects for non-disabled children (Dessemontet & Bless, 2013).

Research indicated the positive benefits of inclusion in its universal sense. For the purpose of this study, it was imperative to examine what inclusion looked like in the Catholic school setting.

Inclusion in Catholic Schools

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in their 2011 address stated their understanding of the changing climate of Catholic schools. They promised their communities and their schools would strive to provide a Gospel-based education of the highest quality, would

be available, accessible, and affordable, and would attempt to launch initiatives in both the private and public sectors to secure financial assistance for parents and create fully inclusive schools (USCCB, 2011).

Throughout history the mission of Catholic schools has been clear: Catholic schools must strive to serve children with varied learning needs. However, despite calls for inclusion from the Vatican, the USCCB, and efforts from trained administrators and professionals to help facilitate inclusion in schools, there was a lack of research and data that supported these initiatives extended to students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools. Data reflecting the exact number of students with disabilities in Catholic schools, however, had been difficult to collect, due to inconsistencies in methodology and sample across studies. Data from 2017-2018 indicated that 5.1% of students in U.S. Catholic schools had a diagnosed disability (NCEA, 2018). However, this number varied in other studies. For example, a 2014 study of Catholic elementary schools reported 11% of students having "identified disabilities," most commonly "mild to moderate learning disabilities, speech impairments, and attention deficit disorders" (Cidade & Wiggins, 2014, as cited in McDonald, 2014, p. 69), while a 2002 study commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops revealed that 7% of students in Catholic schools had an identified disability (USCCB, 2005a). At that time, the number of students with disabilities served by Catholic schools was lower than the number of students in public schools who had a diagnosed disability.

Problem Statement

Throughout history, the mission of Catholic schools has been clear: Catholic schools must strive to serve children with varied learning needs. However, despite calls for inclusion

from the Vatican, the USCCB, and efforts from trained administrators and professionals to help facilitate inclusion in schools, there was a lack of research and data that supports these initiatives extended to students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools.

As Shaughnessy (2005) pointed out, effectively balancing moral and legal duties had vexed many Catholic school communities:

> Civil law requires that all persons be treated and evaluated fairly. The Gospel demands no less. Jesus said: "Let all the little children come to me." He did not say: "Let all the little normal children come to me." While there are some happy exceptions, historically Catholic schools have not done a good job of meeting the needs of special children. (p. 20)

Although called by our vocation and the mission of Catholic schools, students with disabilities (SWD) are underserved in Catholic education. Only approximately 1% of the nation's SWD population (67,000 students) have historically attended private schools with 40% identified as Catholic (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). Despite the small number, SWD and peers that have struggled attend our schools and therefore, must be included meaningfully and served successfully.

Catholic school principals tended to be the main decision maker in admission decisions and, many times, these principals had limited experience with SWD. In order to effectively build more inclusive environments, it was imperative to build both the knowledge and experiential base of Catholic school principals in the area of inclusion. For many Catholic school principals, professional preparation in the areas of exceptionality, special education law and procedure, and interventions or accommodations had been limited. This research aimed to be a resource for

Catholic school leaders and educators that provides the necessary tools to serve students with disabilities, specifically, students with Down syndrome.

Research Questions

The research questions for this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature on inclusion in Catholic schools and were developed naturally based on what issues were important and how issues about disability and inclusive education at St. Marian Catholic elementary school could be examined (Berg, 2004):

1. How does a Catholic elementary school serve students with Down syndrome?
2. What are the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school?

Purpose and Significance

Despite the limitations of data to inform inclusive practices in particular to serving children with Down syndrome in Catholic schools, St. Marian was one such Catholic elementary school that had served at least five students with Down syndrome. This case study investigated and analyzed teachers' and administrators' experiences of serving children with Down syndrome in an attempt to gather data on how the program was created and developed, and what exemplars could be provided to have the program further embraced by other schools in the Catholic school system. Additionally, this data and research aimed to build on the vision and concept that inclusive education in Catholic schools is key to fulfilling the mission of Catholic schools, and the authentic realization of the Catholic social teachings that is the foundation of Catholic communities.

This study sought to inform educational leaders, administrators, and church leaders to gain valuable insight into a vulnerable population that exists within the Catholic school context. This study sought to inform educational leaders to create inclusive policies aligned with Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and results in creating inclusive safe learning environments for students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools. The study sought to contribute a guide for Catholic schools and to contribute to the lack of research in the field of inclusion and Down syndrome.

The significance of this case study lay in witnessing and documenting one elementary Catholic school's experience of creating, developing, establishing, and modeling an inclusion program that serves the needs of its Down syndrome population. This study ultimately provided data to those in similar Catholic school settings in developing and implementing inclusive practices.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation relied on the tenets of CST as its framework. This framework addressed and established the need to support students with Down syndrome in the light of foundational teachings of the Catholic Church. Within the seven tenets of CST, the study focused on the tenets related to the Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Call to Family, Community and Participation, and Option for the Poor and Vulnerable (Bonfiglio et al., 2019). These tenets also related to the civil rights of the students and their families, and it was key that Catholic schools measured their commitment and actions in comparison to these benchmarks.

Method and Design

The study was conducted as a qualitative case study with participants procured through a convenience sample. The case study was conducted at St. Marian, a fully inclusive Catholic

school that serves five students with Down syndrome. The method included semi-structured interviews with the principal, faculty, staff, parents, and Department of Catholic School employees. Document reviews included a review of Church documents, archdiocesan documents, videos, and artifacts. The interview protocol was designed to best serve the purpose of the study.

Conclusion

Inclusion of students with diverse learning needs in Catholic schools was growing and prevalent. Despite a long history to call to serve all learners, Catholic schools had been lagging in openly welcoming students who are academically and behaviorally diverse, especially students with Down syndrome. The expected outcome of this study was to research how a Catholic school had successfully served its students with Down syndrome by understanding the concept of inclusion, identifying barriers and challenges to successful inclusion and ultimately outlining effective and proven practices using a Catholic school example. The hope was to inspire and guide Catholic schools to embrace the mission and welcome and serve all of God's children.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to research how a Catholic school in a large West Coast archdiocese served students with Down syndrome. Data on a formal process of admission, retention, and support for children with Down syndrome and the efficacy of the inclusive practices in Catholic schools for these students was absent. Data reflecting the exact number of students with disabilities in Catholic schools, however, had been difficult to collect due to inconsistencies in methodology and sample across studies. Insufficient data on the number of students with disabilities, especially students with Down syndrome, were served within the archdiocese schools was evidence of this limitation.

This study informs educational leaders and educators about inclusive policies aligned with CST in hopes to create inclusive safe learning environments for students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools. The literature review focused on the tenets of Catholic education, the theoretical framework of the CST, the state of inclusion both nationally and in Catholic schools, the challenges faced by Catholic schools in serving SWD, the definition and characteristics of children with Down syndrome, the benefits of inclusion for students with Down syndrome and their peers, and finally the future of Catholic schools and their service to SWD.

Catholic Education

Mission and Values of Catholic Education

Since the Second Vatican Council and the promulgation of The Declaration on Christian Education (Paul VI, 1965a), there have been numerous documents written by both the Vatican's

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, as well as local episcopal conferences addressing the mission, purpose, importance, and essential elements of Catholic schools in serving the salvific mission of the Church. One theme presented in many of these works was that of the communal nature of Catholic schools and its necessity in fulfilling this mission:

> In the Catholic School, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education in 1977 stated: It is recognized that the proper place for catechesis is the family helped by other Christian communities, especially the local parish. But the importance and need for catechetical instruction in Catholic schools cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Here young people are helped to grow towards maturity in faith. (Aquinas College, 2021, para. 51)

Canon 794 §1 stated that "The duty and right of educating belongs in a special way to the Church, to which has been divinely entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach the fullness of the Christian life" (Vatican, n.d.). Further, pastors are charged with the duty of arranging everything so all the faithful have a Catholic education. Embracing the needs of SWD in schools can be viewed as a way to concretely demonstrate the mission of Catholic education in the formation of the whole person. "When persons with disabilities are excluded from catechetical and academic programs, a piece of the Body of Christ is missing" (National Catholic Partnership on Disability, 2018, p. 54). The Church documents highlighted the moral imperative to create and sustain programming for SWD in Catholic schools. Scanlan (2008a) ties Catholic school programming for SWD with the obligations of CST. In fact, Carlson (2014) argued that, based upon the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and CST, Catholic schools must offer special educational services to remain true to Church teachings. The main elements of Catholic education included the capability of Catholic schools to accommodate educational

change, adapt to new pedagogical styles, focus on the infusion of the Gospel message in all settings, and openness to culture and to a plurality of perspectives (Martin & Litton, 2004).

As Shaughnessy (2005) pointed out, effectively balancing moral and legal duties had vexed many Catholic school communities:

> Civil law requires that all persons be treated and evaluated fairly. The Gospel demands no less. Jesus said: "Let all the little children come to me." He did not say: "Let all the little normal children come to me." While there are some happy exceptions, historically Catholic schools have not done a good job of meeting the needs of special children. (p. 20)

In 2012, The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), endorsed by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), recognized being "Accessible to All Students" as a defining characteristic of a Catholic school: Catholic schools "should do everything in their power to manage available resources and seek innovative options to ensure that Catholic school education is geographically, programmatically, physically, and financially accessible" (p. 3). Moreover, church leaders embraced individuals with disabilities:

> A call for not only specific techniques and programs, but it requires first of all that each face be recognized and accepted, with the tenacious and patient certainty that every person is unique and unrepeatable, and that every excluded face is an impoverishment of the community. (Francis, 2015a, p. 1)

Admitting students with disabilities fit well with the Catholic school mission of compassion as a fundamental fabric in the education of all students, as they learned to express faith through a commitment to help and serve others (Faggella-Luby & Bonfigilio, 2020).

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST), an integral part of Catholic education (Bryk et al., 1993), was a doctrine developed by the Catholic Church regarding social justice, social organization, and the state's responsibility to take care of its people. The ideology of Catholic social teaching was formed in Pope Leo XIII's (1891) encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum*, or *Of New Things*.

Scanlan (2008a) identified CST as the foundation for the implementation of inclusive teaching practices in schools. CST was a body of teaching that was heavily dependent on sacred scripture but also engrossed in pope authored encyclicals and letters dating back to 1891. CST was relevant to the issue of offering inclusive services in Catholic schools. As Brady (2008) observed in considering appropriate responses to societal problems, "Catholics have formed parallel institutions that provide services," and "that advocate for the poor or marginalized in society" (pp. 44-45). In his apostolic letter Pope Paul VI issued (1971) a call to action where he stated that:

> It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. (pp. 47-48)

Paul VI directed the readers to heed to the need in all persons for equality and participation as expressions of God-given human dignity and freedom. In 1965, The Vatican Council II, in its Declaration on Christian Education, called for inclusive education in Catholic institutions, stating that all children, who are entitled as human beings to dignity, have a categorical right to the type of education that respects their individual ability, life goals, their sex, culture, and promotes social fraternity, unity, and harmony (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

In January 2009, Pope Benedict XVI's message for the World Day of Peace reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to social cohesion, stating that "all persons, by reason of their lofty dignity" (Benedict XVI, 2010, p. 1) are included in the mission of the Catholic Church. This pronouncement, together with the ongoing message of the USCCB—previously called the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB)—that the core mission of Catholic education was "to teach as Jesus did" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops [NCCB], 1973, p. 3). It clarified and refocused the purpose of Catholic education stating that today's Catholic school education should be all-inclusive, serving all children regardless of their ability, race, gender, sexual orientation, or social status. There were many reasons why inclusive teaching practices fit well with the mission of Catholic schools and why Catholic schools, by their nature, should include all children. Since Catholic schools are institutions of the Church that are called to faithfully respond to the Church's mission (Bryk et al., 1993), Catholic social teaching informed all aspects of their governance and operation (NCCB, 1973). The NCCB (1973) stated that because of the intimate connection between the Catholic Church and their schools in the United States, their mission is one, meaning that Catholic schools were called to be socially-just places in which all people achieved their human potential, especially those who were poor and

vulnerable. The NCCB (1973) stated that the seven principles of CST, which shaped the purpose of Catholic schools, underscored the urgency of inclusivity in all Catholic organizations, which "rests on the threefold cornerstones of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity" (Leo XIII, 1891, p. 3). These seven principles were: (a) life dignity of the human person, (b) call to family, (c) community and participation, (d) options for the poor and vulnerable, (e) rights and responsibilities, (f) the dignity of work and workers' rights and solidarity, and (g) the stewardship of God's creation (USCCB, 1998b). These tenets represented a core purpose of a practicing Catholic in society, applying to all Catholic persons equally.

The tenets of CST were a practical guide of how to build a just society and citizens in challenging modern times (USCCB, 1998b). CST was also a progressive strand of Catholic education that facilitated the inclusion of students with special needs since it called for the equal treatment of all people. As stated by the USCCB (1998b), "Catholic Social Teaching is a central and essential element of our faith" (p. 1) and as such, it called for a socially just education for all of God's children. CST also stated that as educational institutions of the Church, Catholic schools were intended to be "an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church He founded" (NCCB, 1973, p. 3). Catholic schools were called to be liberating systems in which community was equalized, human dignity was restored, and "mutual respect and acceptance" was nurtured and promoted (Second Vatican Council, 1965, p. 1). The USCCB (1998a) made the importance of Catholic social teaching clear. "Social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith [because it is one of the] true demands of the Gospel" (p. 3). According to the USCCB, CST was the core moral teaching of the Catholic Church. There were other influences at work that called for inclusiveness in Catholic schools.

Catholic institutions, influenced by the words of Pope John Paul II and by Vatican Council II, had been charged to take care of and teach their students regardless of their ability (Second Vatican Council, 1965). For example, in *The Jubilee of the Disabled*, Pope John Paul II (2000a) stated that "the Church is committed to making herself more and more welcoming home [for the disabled]" (sec. 4).

The Catholic social effect, which was directly related to CST, recognized that Catholic schools had been historically not only beneficial for SWD but were potential havens of learning for diverse students (Coleman et al., 1982). The Catholic school community had the ability to embrace all students, due in part to its focus on equity, advocacy, and diversity, and also because of its unique governing system in which each parish and school was given local control over specific decision making (p. 11). This resulted in Catholic schools and their parishes having the independence to identify the needs of its community embrace the diversity of those they were serving and design the most effective academic curriculum to address the needs of its entire student body, including the marginalized.

Why Parents Choose Catholic Schools

Sense of Community

The USCCB (2005a) indicated that it was the responsibility of the whole Catholic community to continue to strive toward the goal of making Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are poor and middle class, and to look for ways to include and better serve young people who have special educational needs.

Bryk et al. (1993) indicated that it was the capability of the Catholic school system to form a sense of community that would make the difference for students from disadvantaged communities. For immigrant families, religion seemed to be more or less irrelevant to the decision to send their children to Catholic school. These families chose Catholic schools to avoid a seriously deficient public-school system (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). In other factors affecting choice, although many low-income families would have liked to send their children to Catholic school, the cost of a Catholic education was an insurmountable barrier for an exceeding number of families. Historically, families were forced to withdraw their children by high school, when costs rose sharply (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). Nonetheless, parents also accepted the value of Catholic education, and data proved that a Catholic education provided a benefit in terms of educational attainment for nearly all groups, and it also had a positive impact in terms of avoidance of certain social problems (Sikkink, 2004). Scholars and the media have commended Catholic schools for performing better than public schools in promoting academic achievement among urban low-income minority students (Bryk et al., 1993). With the focus on justice and equal education for all and challenged with severe budget constraints, Catholic school officials typically responded by choosing to stay in the cities and serve the native and immigrant minorities (Youniss & Convey, 2000). Over time, they had begun to gain recognition for promoting the academic achievement of these minority children. The impact that attending Catholic schools had on minority attainment of higher education and success in higher education institutions was of particular importance. Minority students with Catholic school backgrounds were considered to be better prepared for the rigorous work of college than their traditional public-school counterparts (Setari & Setari, 2016). In addition, minority students with Catholic

school backgrounds were more likely than their non-Catholic school counterparts to attend higher education institutions, have the belief they were going to graduate, and actually graduate (Riordan, 2000).

Culture of Caring

Bempechat et al. (2008) conducted research on low-income students enrolled in Catholic schools to refute the common presumption and belief that students in Catholic schools were successful because "Catholic schools are schools of choice, students who enroll may be smarter, be better off materially, and have parents who are themselves better educated" (p. 168). Research was conducted by working with students in urban Catholic secondary schools where the students were either African American or Dominican. It was found that there was one common factor that led to success for these students, and it was recognized as the presence of a culture of caring in the Catholic schools. These schools had teachers that would take a "deep interest in both their [students'] academic and psychosocial well-being" (p. 171). These students also had developed a personal responsibility for their learning and took ownership of their goals.

Parents and students in Catholic schools have valued teachers with high expectations for academic achievement. Parents, both Catholic and non-Catholic, emphasized that they expected Catholic school teachers to display a caring disposition, suggesting that the caring that led to achievement was a function of the school's religious context. Universally in public and parochial school environments, Noddings (2016) described concern for the dignity and care of each individual child. To care may have meant to be charged with the protection, welfare, or maintenance of something or someone (p. 9). Even student responses stated the notion that caring and high expectations enhanced achievement (Gay, 2000). This sense of caring resonated

with the type of caring that Gay called for in her explication of culturally responsive pedagogy. This type of caring, according to Gay, was manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behavior about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities (Dallavis, 2014).

Opportunity for Full Inclusion of SWD

One of the main factors for progress toward full inclusion in education was empirical evidence documenting academic and social benefits of educating students with mild, moderate, and, under certain circumstances, severe disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities in general education settings (Brock et al., 2016; Carter et al., 2016; Dessemontet et al., 2012; Gasser et al., 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 1981, 1982, 1984a, 1984b; Lew et al., 1986; Maras & Brown, 1996, 2000; Ronning & Nabuzoka, 1993; Wong, 2008). In addition, though there are schools that have had success with specialized instruction for SWD in isolated environments (Kauffman et al., 2002)—particularly for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Landrum et al., 2003)—some parents of SWD had expressed concern regarding their children's special education classes and programs, claiming that, at times, they seemed to lack academic rigor and may not have provided the necessary environment for proper social development (Osgood, 2005, 2008), leaving students and their families feeling ostracized (Menzies & Falvey, 2008). As a result, some parents pulled their children from their special education programs and looked for schools with more inclusive policies and practices; hence there was a growing number of Catholic, private secular, and charter schools that served SWD in inclusive environments of varying degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Within the Catholic school system, many parents of SWD had advocated for inclusion because they wanted their children to have the same access to a Catholic education as families with children without disabilities (Dudek, 2000); scholars (Carlson, 2014; Scanlan, 2009a, 2009b) had posited a moral and ethical obligation on the part of the schools that was grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and the work of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Inclusion

National State of Inclusion

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2000) is a law that had made available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensured special education and related services to those children (Yell et al., 2006). The IDEA governed how states and public agencies provided early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers, birth through age two, with disabilities and their families received early intervention services under IDEA Part C. Children and youth ages 3 through 21 received special education and related services under IDEA Part B. Congress reauthorized the IDEA in 2004 and most recently amended the IDEA through Public Law 114-95, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015).

For the purposes of education and schooling, special education was largely defined by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1997). The term special education typically referred to educational programs designed to serve children with a variety of disabilities that may have interfered with their capacity to be schooled successfully without particular interventions. The

law enacted in 1975 guaranteed a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities and provided that they be educated with their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment (Yell et al., 2006).

Schools and classrooms continued to grow in diversity because of the various backgrounds and learning needs of their students. Soon after, 3.7 million students in the United States were afforded some degree of special education services via the new law (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Over the next 35 years, that number dramatically increased to 6.4 million as of the 2011-2012 school years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Of these 6.4 million students, 94.8%, which equated to approximately 6 million students, were educated in public schools with general education students (GES); almost two-thirds (61%) of those 6 million students spent over 80% of their school day in general education classrooms (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The remaining 5% of the 6.4 million students served under IDEA were split between schools specifically for SWD (4%, or approximately 240,000 students) and private schools with general education students (GES) (1%, or approximately 60,000 students; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Catholic Schools

In the IDEA (2000) law, Congress stated:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (Sec. 1400 [c] [1])

The U.S. Department of Education (2018a) found that although public school districts were obligated to locate, identify, and evaluate any child suspected of having a disability, including those in Catholic schools, Catholic school parents and staff had long reported difficulties in accessing these services. They reported that "the implementation of the (Child Find) process for children in Catholic schools is fragmented at best and 'inhospitable' to children with disabilities whose parents chose to enroll them in Catholic schools" (pp. 12-13). Even when finally examined, the child was significantly less likely to be diagnosed with a disability by a public-school evaluator than through a private evaluator. When the Child Find process worked and the child was determined to have a disability, getting services for the child with special needs was also difficult. The study found that only 13% of the cost of special education and related services for Catholic school students with disabilities was funded by IDEA. Another 34% of the cost was paid by the schools from self-raised revenues that may depend on tuition; the balance was possibly paid for either by state funding, when available, or by the parents directly. This amount was in addition to the baseline tuition paid by the family and was considered an additional burden to the family (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a).

The study concluded that neither the "Child Find" nor the service provision parts of IDEA appeared to be working adequately for Catholic school students with special needs. The 2004 reauthorization process, statute, and regulations were an opportunity for improving this situation. Congress reauthorized the law as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004). Three organizations that represented the interests of Catholic schools and the families who enrolled their children with them worked on improving IDEA: USCCB, NCEA, and the Council for American Private Education (CAPE). All three organizations

provided support and detailed information about the reauthorized law and guidance to Catholic school families and administrators on how to optimize participation under the improved act.

According to the most recent report (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018), the number of public-school students ages 3 to 21 that received special education services during the 2015-2016 academic year was 6.7 million (13.2%)—a slight increase from the 2014-2015 figure of 6.6 million (13%). Of this 13.2%, approximately 4.6% were diagnosed with a specific learning disability, 2.7% with a speech or language impairment, 1.8% with other health impairment, and 1.2% with autism spectrum disorder (NCES, 2018). Since 2007, there has been a 0.5% decrease in serving a specific learning disability along with 5% increases in both autism spectrum disorders and other health impairments (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b).

In 2016, almost 95% of students with disabilities (ages 6-21) were served in regular public schools. The remaining 5% were served as follows: (a) in separate schools for SWDs (3%); (b) in private regular schools at their parents' request (approximately 1%); or (c) in separate residential facilities, homebound, or correctional facilities (less than 1%; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Of the high percentage of students served in regular schools, the U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported that the percentage of time they spent in general education classrooms varied and was dependent on the severity of needs. For example, 63.1% of students spent the majority of their day (80%) in classrooms with peers, 18.3% spent 40% to 79%, and 13.4% spent less than 40% in the general education classroom.

These data showed that separate schools for SWD had become a rarity, and a large portion of the SWD in the United States were educated alongside their peers without disabilities

in general education classrooms, which highlighted the progress inclusion had made over the last half century.

State of Inclusion in Catholic Schools

The Church's Response to Inclusion

Pope John Paul II (2000b) stated in his homily for the Jubilee of the Disabled that "the Church is committed to making herself more and more welcoming home for the disabled. And this welcoming needs not only care, but first of all love which becomes recognition, respect and integration" (p. 84). The church's recent pronouncements on the rights of people with disabilities followed the broader trends toward equity and civil rights espoused by the Church and the Church's consistent teachings on social justice for all. In June 2005, the full body of U.S. Catholic bishops published the document "Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium." The bishops used pronouncements to applaud the increasing number of Catholic school administrators and teachers who took steps to welcome children with disabilities and other special needs into Catholic Schools (Department of Education, 2018a).

Response to Inclusion in the Catholic School Community

While there was ample evidence from the past decade that families of SWD had increasingly sought inclusion into Catholic school communities (Dudek, 2000) the Catholic school community had become more welcoming. For instance, Dudek asserted that in 2000 the NCEA published a short monograph entitled "Is There Room for Me?" That addressed issues related to the inclusion of SWD in Catholic schools (Dudek, 2000). DeFiore (2006) argued that this publication "moved the issue to the top of the association's agenda, especially at the

elementary level" (p. 457). More recently, a division of NCEA, Selected Programs for Improving Catholic Education (SPICE), had highlighted examples of Catholic schools serving students with diverse needs and the Department of Elementary Schools at the National Catholic Education Association (2018) had hosted an annual conference focused on service delivery for students with special needs. Yet despite these gains, inclusive practices in Catholic schools remained the exception, and were often faced with reluctant or even resistant Catholic school educators (Lawrence-Brown & Muschaweck, 2004). Bello (2004) found that only 36% of Catholic secondary schools were serving SWD, and these were primarily limited to students with mild disabilities.

Catholic Schools' Response to Inclusion

There was additional evidence that Catholic schools had joined the nationwide transition toward inclusive education (DeFiore, 2006; Durow, 2013; Scanlan, 2009b), despite the misguided assumption that Catholic schools were exclusive and elite. Approximately 60,000 students with diagnosed and documented disabilities attended private schools and the Catholic school system was the largest faction of the private sector in the United States, with a total enrollment of just over 1.9 million K-12 students (Setari & Setari, 2016). A large portion of those 60,000 students were currently enrolled in Catholic K-12 schools; and this estimate did not include the numerous students with undiagnosed and undocumented disabilities who were educated in Catholic schools. Another much less conservative estimate placed the percentage of students in Catholic schools with disabilities at 7% (USCCB, 2005b), which equated to 133,000 students if based on the total count of 1.9 million. Durow (2013) found a similar 8% estimate in a

survey study that included 19 dioceses across the Midwest but also stated "that Catholic schools are likely serving more students with special needs than is the common perception" (p. 486).

Inclusive Practices in Catholic Schools

Past research showed that Catholic schools were attempting to focus their attention on improving their inclusive teaching practices. Looking at the data with a broad perspective, in the same survey study of 19 Midwest dioceses mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of superintendents reported having implemented purposive, system-wide approaches to inclusion such as general education teachers making instructional adjustments, employing special education teachers, learning consultants, and paraprofessionals, and tapping available public funds and resources specifically Title I and Title II funds (Durow, 2013). Scanlan (2009b) investigated the schools in the Archdioceses of St. Louis and Milwaukee, specifically looking at their system-wide practice of using learning consultants—a model that incorporated "consultation between special and general education faculty aimed at improving pre-referral intervention strategies in the general education classroom" (p. 626). Within these two large Catholic school systems, effective inclusive teaching practices using the learning consultant model depended on the level of guidance and leadership from the central offices and the strength of the relationships that formed among stakeholders (i.e., principals, teachers, and members of the community) within and across schools (Scanlan, 2009b). A deep dive into the nuances of inclusion in Catholic schools, in a multiple case study of three Catholic elementary schools—one of which served students with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and autism—Scanlan (2008b) found collective efforts to improve stakeholders' discourse and attitudes toward inclusivity, facilitate school-family collaboration, and focus the school-wide mission and vision on

welcoming and serving students with mild, moderate, and even severe disabilities. The schools' capacity to effectively include SWD, although limited, was linked to strong leadership and the availability of relevant resources (Scanlan, 2008c). Finally, when it came to educating SWD, Catholic schools in the United States were attempting to meet Catholic Social Teaching expectations (Carlson, 2014; Scanlan, 2009a).

Types of services varied across a continuum of placement (e.g., from general education classes with accommodations [92.6%] to self-contained services [3.7%]), mentoring services (18.5%), peer tutoring (6.9%), and related services, including speech-language (14.8%), and counseling (68.5%). Although the study clearly showed the variety of ways in which SWDs were served, it also described the challenges the schools reported in providing those services. Limited financial and personnel resources were the most prevalent challenges, noted by all respondents, followed by limited knowledge and skillset (92% of respondents) regarding how to service SWDs. Durow (2013) confirmed these findings, concluding that the strategy most implemented for SWDs were adjustments made by the classroom teacher.

A decade later, Bonfiglio et al. (2019) explored the prevalence of SWDs in Catholic schools and current service delivery practices. Preliminary results indicated increased numbers of SWDs participating in Catholic schools and more varied services.

Data on SWD in Catholic Schools

While the statistics for students with disabilities and inclusion were explored and published annually in the public sector, the specific data regarding this population in Catholic schools was not as readily available. Of utmost importance was the realization that SWDs were attending Catholic schools and had been doing so for decades, though in smaller numbers than in

public schools. Nonetheless, the following current statistics were available. The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) reported that in 2017-2018, there were 6,289 Catholic schools (5,092 elementary and 1,197 secondary) serving a combined total of 1,789,363 students. Of this population, 5.1% had some form of diagnosed disability (National Catholic Education Association [NCEA], 2018), which was considerably discrepant from the national statistics (13.2%). In addition, students with mild to moderate disabilities were served in 78.4% of Catholic schools (NCES, 2018). According to a recent (2019) national survey of approximately half of the K-8 Catholic schools in the United States, over 20% of some of the surveyed school populations were identified with a disability and eligible for services under IDEA (Bonfiglio et al., 2019).

Progress in Serving SWD in Catholic Schools

Research affirmed that a growing number of Catholic schools were accepting SWDs and providing support (DeFiore, 2006; Durow, 2013; Scanlan, 2008a). However, the type and level of support offered varied widely (Bello, 2006; Bonfiglio et al., 2019; Durow, 2013).

USCCB (2005a) estimated that more than 185,000 students with disabilities attended Catholic schools. However, only approximately 13,000 (7%) had an eligible diagnosis. Of this 7%, only 1% were receiving service under IDEA. Despite the acceptance of students with disabilities, 87% of dioceses surveyed reported a lack of capacity to meet the needs of students with disabilities. To further explore this issue, Bello (2006) randomly sampled 300 Catholic high schools to examine the issues they experienced while developing and implementing inclusion. Of the 150 responses, the majority reported offering special education services (63%), as opposed to structured special education programming (14.8%) or a department of special education (22.2%).

Research acknowledged that Catholic schools served students with considerable academic and behavioral variability, including students with disabilities, and had done so for decades. Data reflecting the exact number of students with disabilities in Catholic schools, however, had been difficult to collect due to inconsistencies in methodology and sample across studies. Data from 2017-2018 indicated that 5.1% of students in U.S. Catholic schools had a diagnosed disability (NCEA, 2018). However, this number varied in other studies. For example, a 2014 study of Catholic elementary schools reported 11% of students having "identified disabilities," most commonly "mild to moderate learning disabilities, speech impairments, and attention deficit disorders" (Cidade & Wiggins, 2014, as cited in McDonald, 2014, p. 69), while a 2002 study commissioned by the USCCB (2002) revealed that 7% of students in Catholic schools had an identified disability. At that time, the number of students with disabilities served by Catholic schools was significantly lower than the 11.4% of students in public schools who had a diagnosed disability (USCCB, 2002).

Catholic schools in the U.S. were not required to enroll students with disabilities. However, data indicated that the majority of schools did admit students with disabilities (Faggella-Luby & Engel, 2020). According to the 2018 National Center for Education Statistics, 78.4% of Catholic schools served students with mild to moderate disabilities, including physical, emotional, and learning disabilities that are accommodated in regular classrooms with or without special resource teachers. Carlson (2014) cited a NCEA survey of Catholic elementary schools with a 28% response rate. Of the responding schools, "69% accepted students with learning disabilities, 64% students with speech disorders, 61% with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), 37% with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), 20% with emotional/behavioral

disorders (E/BD), 18% with blindness, [and] 11% with deafness" (p. 13). According to Carlson, however, these findings were unlikely to be generalizable to all Catholic schools; the type of services provided were unreported, and fewer than half of those who reported using a resource room model employed a teacher certified in special education.

A U.S. survey of a random sample of 2,566 preschool to sixth grade Catholic schools (response rate 13.3%; $N = 341$) showed a mean of 11.47% students with disabilities, a number that more closely matches national figures. Despite the low response rate, these data were useful for estimating the population of students with disabilities in U.S. Catholic schools more generally. Across respondents, 22.5% of students had learning disabilities; 20.3% had ADHD; 13.1% had speech-language impairments; 5.9% had autism spectrum disorders (ASD); 5.5% had other health impairment (OHI); 2.9% had Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD); and 1.05% had intellectual disabilities (ID) (Bonfiglio et al., 2019). The above statistics notwithstanding, there was conflicting and incomplete data and research on students with disabilities in Catholic schools and the services they were receiving.

Challenges in Serving SWD at Catholic Schools

Due to challenges faced in Catholic schools, serving SWD remained a peripheral conversation. This was reflected through the professional development educators received in Catholic schools. Catholic schools accepted SWD if the school was able to meet their needs with "reasonable accommodations." Since Catholic schools did not receive any direct federal aid (or state aid in most cases) to provide for all kinds of disabilities, some needs were too costly for the schools to be able to provide (Bonfiglio et al., 2019).

Preimesberger (2000) described Catholic schools as hindered from providing the same services of public schools "because of lack of funds, resources, and trained professionals in the area of special education." This logic was similar to the limited information provided in the archdiocese handbook, mentioned earlier, that spoke to the inclusion of SWD. This same logic dictated the initial response of many Catholic schools, which typically claimed they would be "happy to accept" a student with disabilities, but the "needs are too costly for the school to provide" and that the lack of federal and state aid was the barrier.

The ending decade of the 20th century was a shifting, declining period for Catholic schools. Hunt (2000) explained that "in the years following 1966, Catholic enrollment plummeted, beset by doubts about Catholic schools' mission and identity as well as undergoing escalating costs" (p. 44). McLellan's (2000) analysis of Catholic school enrollment between 1940 and 1995 identified three central factors to the decline in the system: "the suburbanization of the Catholic population, racial population shifts in the central cities and the virtual disappearance of women religious teachers" (p. 30). The declining trends in enrollment and changing priorities posed particular challenges to urban Catholic schools serving children in poverty, children of color, and children who were English language learners. Riordan (2000) showed that "Catholic schools on average have become more selective and are no longer serving primarily the disadvantaged or even the working class, despite the fact that a goodly number of minority students now attend Catholic schools" (p. 40). Tuition has continued to climb, growing by over 100% in the past 15 years (USCCB, 2005a). Despite declines in enrollment, Catholic schools remained formidable educational institutions in the United States, comprising 30% of all private schools and nearly half the total private school enrollment (USCCB, 2005b). Yet, as

Youniss and Convey (2000) pointed out, these Catholic schools often bore scant resemblance to their predecessors: “Catholic schools that charge high tuition, place academic achievement first, are staffed by lay teachers, and have significant non-Catholic enrollment resemble only vaguely the system of Catholic schooling that developed over the past 150 years” (p. 9).

Youniss and Convey (2000) explained that at the end of the 20th century Catholic schools found themselves, individually and systematically, facing a crossroads of “fundamental issues about [their] survival and future structure” (p. 2) and called upon researchers to explore these schools “in their very diversity, their vulnerabilities, and their potential contributions to education in the future” (p. 9). While Catholic schools sought to serve all students, in reality they could fall short of this ideal for a variety of reasons (Scanlan, 2009c)

Principal and Teacher Attitude Toward Inclusion

Reluctance to include SWD into general education classrooms due to negative mindsets toward inclusion of teachers and principals was a formidable barrier to inclusive education (Trump & Hange, 1996). For example, teachers in the general education setting might have been overwhelmed with the demands placed on them by the increasing number of students with diverse learning needs placed in their classrooms (Shoho & Katims, 1998). Therefore, negative teacher attitude has been found to be one of the most significant barriers to inclusion (Crockett et al., 2019).

Evidence from literature suggested that teachers generally support the concept of inclusive education but questioned their own ability to teach in an inclusive classroom (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). According to Turnbull et al. (2015), teachers may have felt students with disabilities needed a specialized environment to be successful and that not all students were their

responsibility. Such negativity tainted the culture and prevented a shared philosophy of all are welcome, which was necessary to support students of varied ability levels (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2013). In addition, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) found that 18.2% of principals identified teacher attitudes or negative mindsets were barriers to successful inclusion.

There was some evidence that students with disabilities who were educated alongside their non-disabled peers are subject to higher expectations from teachers compared to students educated in separate settings. An individualized education plan (IEP) is defined as a written document used in the United States outlining a student's unique learning needs, the services required, and how their progress was measured in the classroom. In a seminal study conducted in the United States, researchers examined how the quality of the individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities changed when they left special education classrooms and entered inclusive classrooms. The researchers analyzed the content of the IEPs associated with general education versus special education classes from the students who had made a transition from special to general education. The results showed a significant increase in the quality and expectations of the IEP objectives that were written for students with disabilities once they were placed in inclusive settings (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992).

Some Catholic school educators have claimed that full inclusion is a Don Quixote-like idealistic notion that amounts to little when encountered by the pragmatics of modern schooling (Faggella-Luby & Engel, 2020). In most cases, such views were based on myths about the characteristics, instructional methods, and personal perceptions about individuals with disabilities, especially individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (e.g., Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder; p. 9).

Limited Resources

IDEA (2004) mandated a free and appropriate public education for all students with disabilities. It was evident that IDEA, even with its 2004 improvements, had been inadequate for what was required by Catholic school students with special needs. Under IDEA (2004), Catholic schools received a small allocation of federal funds for the provision of services to students with identified disabilities. However, federal funds did not meet the entire financial obligation of providing services to students with disabilities (DeFiore, 2006). Under the law, comparable public-school students were guaranteed—at least by law—proper diagnosis and treatment of their needs at government expense. Under IDEA, Catholic school students were guaranteed—again by law and in theory—a proportionate share of the federal appropriation for services as a group, but there was no individual entitlement. Therefore, special education services in Catholic schools continued to be funded mostly by parents of such children either directly or through enhanced tuition for all students. Successful and effective inclusion required substantial resources. Specifically, ensuring evidence-based frameworks and practices were in place to support the variability of learners required commitment to providing adequate personnel, professional development, and programming. Inclusion of SWDs in the general education classroom could have required additional faculty and staff (i.e., special educators, paraprofessionals, and specialists). In addition, alternate curricula, activities, and technology may have been needed to support diverse learning needs. For these reasons, many viewed inclusion as a costly endeavor (Crockett, 2019).

Adequate inclusion in Catholic schools and implementation of effective practices ensured successful outcomes for SWDs. Thus, budget, time allocation, and the dearth of support became

obstacles. Historically, lack of funding in Catholic schools had been noted as a barrier for inclusion (Bello, 2006; Crowley & Wall, 2007; Durow, 2013).

Durow (2013) asserted that core barriers impeding Catholic schools from serving SWD and special needs were inadequate funding, insufficient teacher preparation and confidence, inaccessible buildings, and inconsistent commitment from parishes and boards. Unlike Catholic schools and regulated by the nature of mandate, public schools were required by statute to implement special education programming. Therefore, all of the resources available were related to inclusionary practices within the public-school sector (and the governmental resources that accompany this approach). Catholic school educators were often left to have to translate these programs into the Catholic school context with little to no technical assistance. This often left the Catholic school isolated and without support. As a result, Catholic schools were reluctant to include SWD because they did not have the technical skills or the capacity/support to implement these approaches (p. 488).

In a study of a Catholic high school that included students with different types of disabilities, Powell (2004) showed how a Catholic school provided services to SWD through charging parents of SWD significant extra fees. In 1985, when the program began, these extra fees were $2,400 on top of tuition. Fourteen years later, these fees were cut in half based on fundraising efforts. Parents of SWD had to assist the school in these additional fundraisers. The additional fees and obligatory supplemental fundraising for families of SWD indicated the way these families are typically treated in Catholic schools. Powell conveyed a note from a family of a child with Down syndrome in which the parents communicated to the principal, “It was most impressive that your first reaction was not one of “absolutely not,” which is a response that

parents of special needs children learn to expect" (p. 94). Catholic school educators had taken for granted that it was the lack of resources inhibiting their inclusion of SWD. Ryan (2010) illustrated this by introducing a report of an innovative program for SWD in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia: "Many Catholic schools clearly do lack the resources *(but certainly not the will)* [italics added] to provide fully for special needs students" (p. 32).

Bello (2006) investigated the attributes, challenges, and needs of Catholic high schools when attempting to implement specialized services to students with disabilities. Survey results from a stratified random sample of 300 Catholic high schools indicated that 96.2% reported that finances or funding was a primary challenge. Moreover, 64.8% of schools ranked funding as their number one obstacle to implementation. On a smaller scale, Durow (2013) surveyed 19 midwestern Catholic schools regarding inclusive practices; of these, 14 (73.7%) indicated limited funds as a barrier. More recently, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) identified financial constraints as the most frequently reported barrier to inclusion (43.6% of principals). Catholic schools struggled to fund services and personnel to appropriately include and support students with disabilities (Burke & Griffin, 2016). Given insufficient federal and state funds, Catholic schools were left to seek out local funding sources and grants in order to serve their students with exceptionalities (DeFiore, 2006). Effectively supporting diverse learning needs (both students with and without disabilities) requires evidence-based practices. Kurth et al. (2017) outlined a series of indicators of quality inclusive education, including multi-tiered systems of support and other evidence-based practices (e.g., general education class membership, progress monitoring, peer supports). Implementing these practices with fidelity required thoughtful, shared planning time. Allocating time for collaboration could be difficult (Friend & Bursuck, 2006). Teachers

were expected to attend many meetings for learning and collaboration and have various other demands on their time. In addition, paraprofessionals often had competing duties (e.g., bus duty or lunch duty) during meeting times, which made collaboration difficult (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2013). The above constraints were barriers both within the public domain and in Catholic schools (Bello, 2006; Durow, 2013). Catholic schools historically have held a perception of "one size fits all" with regard to education and, therefore, did not have the necessary knowledge to address multiple aspects of diversity (Durow, 2013). In addition, limited time was a barrier to addressing the multiple challenges of implementing inclusion as the time barrier affected teachers' knowledge and skills in implementing inclusive education (Bello, 2006).

Though finances mattered, implementing inclusive education was not exclusively a matter of additional financial resources (Curcic, 2009). Effective inclusive education required teachers and other educational professionals to regularly engage in collaborative problem solving.

Through whole school collaboration, school staff could share ideas and strategies to address the specific challenges faced by individual students with and without disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2006). Teachers and other school staff worked together to devise classroom-based interventions that can increase a student's chances for success (Bouillet, 2013). This collaboration may have involved interactions between classroom teachers, speech and language specialists, school psychologists and the principal, who all worked together to meet the needs of each individual student, dividing time and sharing resources. All these aspects of inclusive education require time and resources.

Limited Formal Training and Professional Development Opportunities

A large study conducted in the United States indicated that around one-fifth of general education teachers who taught students with disabilities reported that they did not have adequate support, and one-third felt that they were not adequately trained to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Blackorby et al., 2007).

A common reaction by educators and other members of a Catholic school community was nervousness during the first steps of becoming a more inclusive school. This was not surprising as certified elementary and secondary educators typically only completed one course on serving students with disabilities in their teacher preparation programs. Functionally, this meant that they had only taken one class to cover the learner characteristics associated with 13 categories of disability as recognized by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2004), the individualized education plan (IEP) components and process, related federal laws concerning rehabilitation, let alone the civil rights history or current service delivery frameworks like multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) (Faggella-Luby & Bonfiglio, 2020). Adding to the nervousness some Catholic educators felt concerned in regard to the education of students with disabilities was that in the larger society those with disabilities were often marginalized by a lack of appropriate services leading to limited outcomes, causing some to falsely equate limited outcomes with limited ability (Faggella-Luby et al., 2015).

Many teachers attributed their hesitation to include students with disabilities to a lack of proper training. Lack of specialized training and educator experience has been reported to be an obstacle to successful service of students with disabilities (Crowley & Wall, 2007; Durow, 2013). For example, Durow (2013) found that 50% of the Catholic school systems surveyed

indicated a lack of trained teachers and/or shortage of teachers with special education certification as a barrier to Catholic school inclusion. The most recent Catholic school studies report supported these findings. Boyle and Hernandez (2016) noted that 29.1% of surveyed principals reported lack of experience and training as a constraint. Similarly, Bonfiglio et al. (2019) found that teacher knowledge of students with disabilities and teacher preparation of serving SWDs rated among the top identified major obstacles to successful inclusion.

Catholic school principals were met with the above challenges often, as they considered the diverse learning needs of their students. One of the most challenging and emotional conversations was when a family is informed that the school cannot meet the special needs of their special needs child, requiring them to transfer the student (and often other siblings) to a public school (DeFiore, 2006).

In various studies, teachers remarked that they lacked adequate knowledge, facilities, skills, and trainings to serve students with special needs. These concerns also shaped teachers' perceptions of inclusion. Multiple studies have found that teachers who have received training on inclusion were more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Sharma et al., 2008). After receiving training, teachers felt more positively about including students with disabilities. Pre-test and post-test scores showed that teachers who participated in the study increased their teaching skills and knowledge of inclusive education (Oswald & Swart, 2011).

The Future for Catholic Schools in Their Service to SWD

Since the 1925 *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* decision, Catholic parents were given the right to educate their children in nonpublic schools. Catholic

institutions, led by the words of Pope John Paul II, have attempted to accept those with special needs as in the public-school system. John Paul II (2000b) stated in his homily for the Jubilee of the Disabled that "the Church is committed to making herself more and more a welcoming home [for the disabled] and this welcoming needs not only care, but first of all love, which becomes recognition, respect and integration" (sec. 4). The Church's recent pronouncements on the rights of people with disabilities followed the broader trends toward equity and civil rights espoused by the Church and the Church's consistent teachings on social justice for all (John XXIII, 1961, 1963; Leo XIII, 1891).

As discussed, the bishops have noted the value in the interaction between those individuals with disabilities and those without. In such an interchange, it was "often the person with a disability who gives the gift of most value" (USCCB, 1998b, p. 28). Educating individuals with disabilities within the Catholic school setting helped those without disabilities to see the real world reflected in their school, created a sense of normalization that disability is a part of life, and helped to minimize the stigma of disability. Whereas there were several other sources of information around sustainable approaches to inclusionary approaches, there were none dedicated to the unique context of Catholic schools. It was not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words would lack weight unless they were accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action (Paul VI, 1971, p. 48). These words from Pope Paul IV served as a call to Catholic schools to adapt and innovate to meet the needs of the students that were entering the schoolhouse doors. Across the country, anecdotal evidence suggested that there

was growth in programming for SWD in Catholic schools (Burke & Griffin, 2016; Durow, 2013; Powell, 2004). However, Moreau et al. (2006) suggested:

> The pockets of excellent practice that are evident in many Catholic schools demonstrate that Catholic school teachers and administrators can develop an attitude of inclusiveness as well as problem-solving models that allow excellent programming and accommodations to develop in settings that are not funded adequately. (p. 213)

In order to expand services for SWD within Catholic schools, there was a need for a systematic approach to developing comprehensive systems for inclusionary practices in Catholic schools. A coordinated effort to connect these isolated pockets of innovation would help to give voice to exemplary programs and offer support to a variety of faith-based schools (Cunningham et al., 2017). The comprehensive system to support SWD (Boyle & Bernards, 2016) included articulated professional development needs and supports from the classroom level to the national organizational level. By adopting a common model of integration, new collaboration among Catholic schools can be fostered. A unified approach would open the doors for the creation of shared service delivery systems that could maximize limited resources in the service of SWD. A common framework provided a shared vocabulary about serving SWD and a unified voice that would help clearly articulate this mission to potential funders and policy writers.

Catholic schools faced many challenges in developing responses to serving SWD. Yet, as Pope Paul IV reminded us, “The Church invites all Christians to take up a double task of inspiring and innovating in order to make structures evolve so as to adapt them to the real needs of today” (Paul VI, 1971, p. 48). “We are a single flock under the care of a single shepherd. There can be no separate Church for persons with disabilities” (USCCB, 1998b, p. 76). It cannot

be enough to just recognize that Catholic schools should have been addressing the needs of SWD and continue to place the inability to do so on the lack of resources. Catholic schools must be moved to action. Given the constraints that schools faced, Catholic schools needed to find viable ways to address the needs of those with disabilities. This called for unprecedented levels of cooperation among Catholic schools and various other stakeholders. By developing a unified vernacular and shared framework, Catholic schools and other stakeholders could find a common ground for collaboration in the development of effective avenues to provide services to those with disabilities (Cunningham et al., 2017). Catholic schools must have ensured that those with disabilities were full participants and experienced belonging in Catholic schools.

The first section of this literature review examined how the moral obligation of Catholic social teaching compelled Catholic schools to serve students with disabilities including the history of inclusion in Catholic schools, and the challenges faced by Catholic schools in meeting the moral obligations while serving students with disabilities. Since the purpose of this study was to focus on students with Down syndrome. the next section of this literature review focused on the history and medical description of Down syndrome, challenges parents of children with Down syndrome faced, and finally, how students with Down syndrome and their peers benefited from inclusion.

Down Syndrome

Definition of Down Syndrome

Down syndrome has been defined as the manifestation of chromosomal abnormalities that cause a highly variable degree of learning difficulties and physical disabilities (National Down Syndrome Society, 2001). John Langdon Down was the first to describe what is called

Down syndrome. The disorder was classified as a syndrome because of the consistency of the collection of signs or characteristics.

By 1959, a group of geneticists, headed by scientist Jerome Lejeune, found that the same chromosomal disorder was present within all individuals with Down syndrome. He and his colleagues found that people with Down syndrome had an additional 47th chromosome. Trisomy 21 has been the most common cause of Down syndrome and has accounted for 95% of the cases (National Down Syndrome Society, 2001). Additionally, studies have shown heredity has caused up to 5% of children who have been born with Down syndrome.

Symptoms of Children with Down Syndrome

Despite advances in prenatal screening, Down syndrome is expected to remain a relatively common genetic disorder, and the severity of Down syndrome varies. Some affected individuals may be high functioning and go on to be employed and live independently; at the same time, others may require assistance throughout the course of their lives (Cunningham, 1996). There have been over 50 clinical signs of Down syndrome, but it has been rare to find all of them, or even most of them, in one person. Individuals with Down syndrome were usually smaller than their non-disabled peers, and their physical and intellectual development occurred at a slower rate.

Approximately one third of babies born with Down syndrome have had heart defects, most of which could be successfully corrected. Some individuals were born with gastrointestinal tract problems that could be surgically corrected as well (Cunningham, 1996).

Intellectual Development of Children with Down Syndrome

The intellectual development of children with Down syndrome has been similar to that of non-disabled children but has had varying degrees of severity in delays (Appl, 1998). Appl stated that most children with Down syndrome scored in the mild to moderate range on standardized tests. Children with Down syndrome have generally developed in the same sequence as those developing normally, but at a much slower rate. Appl (1998) asserted that the attention span of children with Down syndrome was shorter, and their motivation was less than that of children developing normally. The language of children with Down syndrome was also slower to develop. They have had difficulty with spontaneous and intelligible speech. Many of these students may have required the aid of a speech therapist or communication device (p. 85). The language, motor and social skill differences often associated with students diagnosed with Down syndrome should have affected the teacher's choice of instructional methods and behavior management strategies in order to have ensured successful behavior modification (Perner & Porter, 1998). Although this study focused on the disability of Down syndrome, it does not address those students within an inclusion setting.

Inclusion of Children with Down Syndrome in General Education Settings

Not only has inclusion for children with Down syndrome been required by law and increased in practice, it has also been desired by parents. A study by Freeman (1999) examined the perceptions of parents in regard to the educating of their children with Down syndrome. The researcher did a qualitative study and interviewed 50 parents of children with Down syndrome regarding their placement within the school setting. Freeman found that 80% of those parents questioned wanted their children to be included in general education classrooms with non-

disabled peers. Furthermore, the study revealed that greater levels of parental satisfaction existed among parents of children who were included in general education classrooms above parents of children in self-contained classes. According to Freeman, current research has shown the desire for inclusion of children with students with Down syndrome.

Research has also shown the benefits for children with Down syndrome in participating within inclusion models of education. According to Roach (1992), inclusion experiences among children with Down syndrome were perceived by many general education teachers as positive due to their higher level of sociability and perceived dispositions, which has not been shown to be the case with other disabilities.

Roach (1992) reported, "Inclusion has been hailed as a win-win situation by the National Association of State Boards of Education" (p. 9). Including students diagnosed with Down syndrome within the general education setting has become more frequent for two reasons: Parents have become more informed of educational opportunities and legislation required students to be educated in their least restrictive environment (Davis, 1995). Although no long-term studies have been designed to show the success of inclusion specifically for those students diagnosed with Down syndrome as well as the general education students, it is clear that inclusion has started to take place in many forms in schools across the United States (Davis, 1995). According to Lipsky and Gartner (1997), although students diagnosed with Down syndrome have been gaining access to inclusion, effective social outcomes, such as the development of friendships and positive peer relationships, have often not achieved. Frequently the disabled student has been treated as if he or she is separate within the general education class and not seen as a member of the class, which could lead to peer rejection.

Characteristics of Down Syndrome and Full Inclusion

Children with Down syndrome exhibit common strengths that facilitate their inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Research has indicated that children with Down syndrome are strong visual and social learners, particularly through observation and imitation (Hughes, 2006). They have responded well to praise and rewards, rather than to punishment, and have not exhibited any behavior issues unique to Down syndrome (Alton, 1998; Wolpert, 2001). When teachers have been asked to describe a single personality characteristic most typical of children with Down syndrome, common answers have included affectionate, happy, and friendly (Gilmore et al., 2003). Any behavioral problems observed in children with Down syndrome have mirrored those seen in children without Down syndrome (Alton, 1998).

Challenges for Students with Down Syndrome

Despite the favorable characteristics that has allowed for inclusion of students with Down syndrome in the general education setting, children with Down syndrome have exhibited some common learning challenges. These have included challenges with short-term auditory memory (i.e., learning from listening) and speech and language. Children with Down syndrome sometimes have struggled in learning new words, learning grammar and syntax, and following complex verbal instructions or stories (Alton, 1998). As a result, teachers in inclusive classrooms have suggested that the most effective learning materials for Down syndrome children includes "hands-on" materials and computer-assisted technology rather than worksheets or textbooks (Wolpert, 2001). Teachers may also have chosen to provide visual instructions or timetables and reinforce all curricula visually (e.g., presenting a word in print alongside a picture to increase vocabulary; Alton, 1998).

Although inclusive settings have provided students with Down syndrome the opportunity to develop friendships with non-disabled peers, some research has suggested that students with intellectual disabilities can sometimes struggle to develop strong social bonds within an inclusive setting (Buckley et al., 2006; Freeman & Alkin, 2000; Szumski & Karwowski, 2014). Differences in emotional maturity and intellectual ability have interfered with the formation of reciprocal friendships between children with Down syndrome and their non-disabled peers (Cuckle & Wilson, 2002; Fox et al., 2004). Genuine friendships between children with Down syndrome and their non-disabled peers have often developed through shared interests and class-based activities (Fox et al., 2004). Children with Down syndrome may have interests more similar to those of younger children, and parents have often hesitated to provide increasing levels of independence to adolescents with Down syndrome (Cuckle & Wilson, 2002). Schools have facilitated interactions between students with and without Down syndrome using a variety of approaches. Teachers have educated peers about the nature of disabilities like Down syndrome and instructed them how to behave supportively in these group settings. Teaching staff has also helped students with Down syndrome interpret social situations and initiate interactions with non-disabled students (Dolva et al., 2011). Teachers may also have chosen to create formalized peer-buddy or friendship groups with non-disabled peers. Evidence on the effectiveness of such programs has been limited, but preliminary research has indicated that structured social programs may benefit children with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities (Barrett & Randall, 2004; Carter et al., 2005; D'Haem, 2008). The fact that forming strong relationships has been difficult in a general education classroom should not necessarily be interpreted as meaning these settings were not socially appropriate for students with disabilities. Rather, it has suggested that

teachers and schools must pay attention to the psychosocial development of students with disabilities in general education settings and general education teachers need improved training and resources in order to create effective, inclusive learning environments that foster both the academic and social growth of students with disabilities (Cuckle & Wilson, 2002).

Benefits of Inclusion of Students With Down Syndrome

Academic Benefits

Researchers have documented evidence that inclusion yields academic benefits for students with intellectual disabilities in general and students with Down syndrome specifically. Among students with intellectual disabilities, such as students with Down syndrome, inclusive education has been repeatedly shown to support academic development, particularly in the areas of language and literacy (de Graaf et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2008). A 2000 review of the scholarly literature found that integrated students have performed better than their comparable segregated counterparts and concluded that available research has supported the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in general education settings (Freeman & Alkin, 2000). There has been evidence that inclusive education is particularly beneficial for the development of language and literacy skills among students with Down syndrome. When done successfully, inclusion has encouraged a sense of belonging, acceptance of differences, and creation of classrooms that would support the needs of everyone (Voltz et al., 2001).

Other Benefits

Studies have shown increased passing rates on eighth-grade assessments (Idol, 2006) and graduation rates when in more inclusive settings even as standards-based expectations have risen (Goodman et al., 2011), and greater academic gains than students with disabilities educated in

less inclusive settings (Cole et al., 2004). Regarding more discrete academic skills, improvements in mathematics achievement, problem solving, and language development have also been reported in the literature for students with disabilities in more inclusive settings (e.g., Friend & Bursuck, 2006). For example, Salend and Duhaney (1999) found that students with low-incidence disabilities demonstrated increases in overall skills and rates of time spent on task and were exposed to more academic content than peers with similar disabilities in less inclusive settings. In addition, students with disabilities were found to have similar rates of office discipline referrals (ODR) as their typically achieving peers (e.g., Cawley et al., 2002).

Benefits of Inclusion to Students Without Disabilities

Academic and Social Benefits

Contrary to common misperceptions, countless studies have shown that students that are typically developing have achieved increases socially and academically (e.g., Bulgren et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2012; McMaster et al., 2008). As one example, Faggella-Luby et al. (2007) found that during reading comprehension instruction for students with and without disabilities, both high-achieving and typically achieving students (as well as students with disabilities) outperformed students in a control group receiving evidence-based instruction. Of note is the fact that the study took place in a Catholic school (Faggella-Luby et al., 2007).

Inclusive education could provide a range of academic and social benefits for students with disabilities, such as higher achievement in language and mathematics, improved rates of high school graduation, and more positive relationships with non-disabled peers. Nevertheless, many parents and teachers have had concerns that the inclusion of students with disabilities might come at the expense of their non-disabled classmates. They may have worried that the

modifications or accommodations that students with disabilities required in inclusive classrooms would impede the learning of non-disabled students (Peltier, 1997). Despite these concerns, research has demonstrated that, for the most part, including students with disabilities in regular education classes has not harmed non-disabled students and may have even conferred some academic and social benefits.

Drawing on research from 26 studies conducted in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Ireland, it was found that the vast majority (81%) of study findings indicated that non-disabled students either experienced no effects (58% of studies) or experienced positive effects (23% of studies) on their academic development as a result of being educated alongside students with disabilities (Kalambouka et al., 2007).

Challenges in Mainstreaming Students with Severe Disabilities

Critics of inclusion have raised concerns that disruptive behavior from students with severe emotional disabilities may redirect teachers' attention away from fostering the academic and social growth of all students. Although the majority of the research reviewed for this study has indicated that inclusion yields neutral or positive effects on the academic achievement of non-disabled students, there has been some evidence that the inclusion of multiple students with diagnosed severe emotional disabilities within a single classroom could present unique challenges for teachers. Drawing on data from a large longitudinal study of young children in the United States, researchers have found evidence that having multiple classmates with a severe emotional disability could have a small negative impact on reading and mathematics skills (Fletcher, 2010), school behavior, and approaches to learning skills (Gottfried, 2014) of non-disabled students. The researchers emphasized that these potential small negative effects on non-

disabled students had been driven by those classrooms in which two or more students with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities were present and suggested that having one classmate with a disability should not worsen outcomes for non-disabled children. Diagnosed severe emotional and behavioral disabilities are rare.

The variation in reported impacts of inclusion on non-disabled students may be attributable to how inclusion was implemented. In many studies, "inclusion" has been defined as the presence of one or more students with disabilities in classrooms that also includes non-disabled students. In other studies, inclusion has been defined by teachers' use of practices that made the curriculum accessible to a wide range of students. A review by Saint-Laurent and colleagues (1998) noted that positive effects were most common in studies where support for students with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms was well-managed through adaptive instruction and the collaborative consultation and cooperative teaching of special and general education teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology for the study. Included are the research questions, study purpose, study design, participants of the study, data collection instrument used for the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. This research study used a case study methodology to better understand, investigate, and capture participants' experiences, thoughts, and voices (Hatch, 2002).

The evidence presented here was drawn from a case study conducted at a Catholic elementary school that served at least five students with Down syndrome. This study used qualitative methods to investigate social action, subjective experiences, and conditions that influenced actions and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002) through a single case study design (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). A selection criteria and purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) led to the identification of Catholic elementary schools in the archdiocese where over half the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, were English language learners or identified as having special needs. A pool of five potential sites in a multi-city region of a large west coast county was narrowed to the most stable and exemplary site that served the highest number of registered full-time students with Down syndrome. The final site, St. Marian's (pseudonym), was chosen because it was relatively typical in its structure as a Catholic elementary school, yet it exhibited exceptional success at serving students with Down syndrome and had an administrator and community that were willing to participate in the research.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study dictated that a case study methodology be used mainly because the research questions were concerned with deriving meaning from participants' stories and words and not from the school's academic scores, IQ tests, and/or other academic statistics.

The research questions for this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature on inclusion in Catholic schools and was developed naturally based on what issues were important and how issues about disability and inclusive education at St. Marian school could be examined (Berg, 2004). The case study investigated areas related to the research questions:

1. How does a Catholic elementary school serve students with Down syndrome?
2. What are the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school?

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to explore, document and examine the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of the St. Marian school community, including administrators, teachers and parents who have witnessed the inclusion of students with Down syndrome at their Catholic elementary school. Durow (2013) asserted that core barriers that impeded Catholic schools from serving students with special needs were "inadequate funding, insufficient teacher preparation and confidence, inaccessible buildings, and inconsistent commitment from parishes and boards" (p. 487). This study provided a clearer understanding of the moral duty to meet students' special needs, and in this affirmation and understanding, Catholic school communities

position themselves to fully embrace inclusive models that will allow them to surmount these barriers. This study was significant because it produces foundational data and practices that will allow other schools to model their own inclusive practices and approach. This includes practices related to admission policies, inclusive service delivery, and professional development for teachers and administrators. The unique aspect of this study was the focus on students with Down syndrome and a dedicated approach to adequately serve them in a Catholic school setting.

Based on the investigation of the "the lived experiences of real people in real settings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7) and by focusing on participants' perspectives, this study documented the current policies and procedures at St. Marian. The purpose of the study included the review of the literature and data available on Catholic schools and their service to students with Down syndrome. Thereby, it provides procedural direction as a model for Catholic school administrators to similarly replicate creating an inclusive community at their school sites and initiating policy development specifically related to inclusion of students with Down syndrome.

Qualitative Case Study Research: Rationale

Berg (2004) stated that research that depends on an inquiry in its naturalistic setting is best suited to a case study methodology. This method of qualitative research has been a method of inquiry appropriated in many different academic disciplines (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative case study research and researchers aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Mills & Gay, 2002). The qualitative method was used to investigate the "why" and "how" of decision making, not just the what, where, and when. Since the goal of this research was one of social betterment, the qualitative method was the best choice for exploring the proposed research questions at hand.

Since "our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, [and] patterns of a way of life" (Hymes, 1982, p. 214), a qualitative case study inquiry best served this investigation and these types of research questions. Qualitative case study research has a goal of "improving the rationality and justice of [a]…social or educational practice" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1998, p. 6). This methodology assisted in documenting the real-life experiences and the beliefs of the community of St. Marian Catholic elementary school.

Case Study Methodology: Rationale

St. Marian School is a unique school in a large West Coast archdiocese, serving students with Down syndrome. Because of this 'richness of phenomenon,' the case study qualitative research approach was the best suited to research the extensiveness of the "real-life context" (Yin, 2009). This method was also administered to intensively study the phenomena and uncover the relevant data and other variables of interest as a result of qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). Yin (2009) described case studies as the preferred method of discovering truth when the focus of the inquiry is contemporary, exists uniquely in one real-life context, and when "the investigator has little control over events" (p. 2).

The case study methodology was considered the most effective and reliable method of inquiry because this study aimed to conduct an in-depth investigation to make meaning of a specific, single unit, present-day program within a bounded system (Merriam, 2002). This relevance was also marked since the study of the phenomena "has a finite quality about it either in terms of time (the evolution or history of a particular program), space . . . and/or components comprising the case" (Merriam, 2002, p. 178).

During the 2020-2021 academic year data was collected through interviewing and conducting archival research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and schools being on distance learning, virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted over 3 to 5 days with administration, faculty, staff, and parents. Additional data for analysis included archival documents related to the school's enrollment trends, mission implementation, policies and procedures of recruitment, retention, funding, and governance structures.

Setting: St. Marian Catholic Elementary School

Participants and Selection Criteria

St. Marian Catholic elementary school was chosen as the research site using a convenient and purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is used when a densely information-rich case (Patton, 2002) is chosen for an in-depth and intensive study. The primary reason for selecting St. Marian was its focus on serving students with Down syndrome when many of the Catholic schools in the said archdiocese were not inclusive at this level. The research questions were best suited to the inquiry made at this school site and the information and data gathered was significant in creating landmark and foundational cases for all the schools in the Catholic school setting.

Hatch (2002) stated that other reasons to choose a context for research would be its "accessibility, feasibility, and familiarity" (p. 44). St. Marian has been led by Sister Teresa (pseudonym) for the past 18 years. Sister Teresa has been instrumental in creating and sustaining an all-inclusive program at the school site. My former role as a principal in the same deanery, and my role of assistant superintendent at the time of the study, has allowed me to create a relationship with the administrator that fostered the familiarity and trust needed to conduct an

effective study. Considering the rich history of inclusive education at St. Marian School, it was evident that the administrator was dedicated in supporting a study that would ultimately further inclusive education in Catholic schools.

Data Collection Methods

This study used the following qualitative methods of data collection to answer the research questions: semi-structured interviews, and analysis of documents and archival data. This multiple method approach of data collection would "validate and clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443), while investigating the academic and social experiences of inclusion participants. Focusing on collecting data to gather responses on the research questions, the interview questions spoke to the attitudes of the community toward children with Down syndrome. This informed the policies and procedures that were in place to bolster the mission of the school that ultimately supported all children, especially students with Down syndrome. The study shed light on the challenges faced by this all-inclusive educational model, the professional development and support received to effectively teach students with Down syndrome, and finally the expectations from the Department of Catholic Schools. These questions were designed to understand how St. Marian served its students with Down syndrome and how this model could be replicated for other schools within the Catholic school context.

Semi-structured Interviews

Denscombe (2014) described semi-structured interviews as a clear list of issues or questions that allow for flexibility. He stated that "the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered . . . to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 186).

All interview protocols were semi-structured that allowed for impromptu elaboration and the freedom to expand upon topics that unexpectedly emerged and were relevant to the study. Interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry that help researchers explore participants' experiences of events, helping find answers to questions that would otherwise be hidden from discovery because it is not a part of something that can be understood simply by direct observation (Hatch, 2002). Patton (2002) stated that the purpose of interviewing was to "allow [the researcher] into the other person's perspective, [assuming] that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341). Although the quality of the information obtained during an interview depends on the art and ability of the researcher (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995), interviews have been a highly effective way to "uncover meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91).

Essentially, there have been different types of interviews used for gathering specific types of data, recording different types of experiences, or for getting at the core meaning of participants' feelings, thoughts, or beliefs (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Since the main purpose of the interviews for this study was to capture the true, sensitive, and at times intimate feelings of what the participants believed about serving students with Down syndrome, semi-structured interviews were used. When semi-structured interviewing is used to collect data, it can be used in a range of ways: A small number of participants can be interviewed a series of times or many participants can be interviewed only once at great length (Hatch, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews use structure in order to explore specific themes and to allow for the flexibility needed to search for answers while allowing for the exploration of views and feelings not anticipated. The nature of the research question also dictated the selection of using semi-structured interviews. The research questions in this study dealt specifically with collecting data related experiences, beliefs, and were considered primarily "cultural" (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Quality of Questions

The quality of the interview questions is important to bring out the responses needed to answer and give insight to the research questions. Moustakas (1994) suggested asking broad, general questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Creswell noted these basic questions lead to more textual and structural descriptions of experiences that will later provide an understanding of participants' common experiences.

Document Analysis

Data analysis was acutely important in the accurate exploration of the current reality of St. Marian and its service to students with Down syndrome. This was primarily due to the fact that the study at St. Marian represented contemporary research conducted in a highly literate environment in which "documents are written, read, stored, and circulated" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 56). This was particularly true in this study as the documents such as archdiocesan staff handbooks, staff and faculty handbooks, and communications with parents and faculty would speak to the foundations in place for inclusive services provided at the school. This document

analysis was significant as it offered the researcher "insight into participants" lives (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 117).

The analysis of these documents and archival date provided vital information regarding the school community's views on inclusive education and provided an understanding of how inclusive education was the basis of the school's daily functions, as well as how the school "works and how people work with/in them" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 57). By triangulating the data and examining where the data intersected, the state of inclusive education at St. Marian was studied (Silverman, 2010, p. 133).

Instruments

The instruments to conduct data collection included a semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol included questions inspired by research and literature on serving students with disabilities in Catholic schools. Due to the global pandemic all interviews were conducted virtually and Zoom software was used for conducting, recording and transcribing these interviews. Dedoose software was employed for coding and memoing the interviews (Dedoose software tool version 8.1, 2018). The usage of this software is further explained in the analysis section.

Transcriptions

Most of the audio recordings and written transcripts for each of the interviews were done through the Zoom application. This application records and transcribes all spoken words in real time. Due to the global pandemic and measures taken to keep the participants safe, Zoom (https://zoom.us) meeting software was also used for virtual interviews. This software records and transcribes the audio for record keeping. Though these computer-based applications are

advanced in nature and serve the purpose of transcription certain words that were misspelled were corrected and placed in accurate context.

Data Disposal and Destruction

In accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards and ethics, all data will be permanently deleted. This includes all digital data from transcripts, notes, audio recordings, and emails. This destruction and disposal of data will take place 1 year from the date of final submissions of the dissertation and approval from the committee.

Positionality and Reflexivity: Role as Principal Researcher

> Our generation will show that it can rise to the promise found in each young person when we know how to give them space. This means that we must create the material and spiritual conditions for their full development; to give them a solid basis on which to build their lives; to guarantee their safety and their education to be everything they can be. (Francis, 2015b, p. 16)

Myra walked onto our school campus along with her parents with a lot of promise but lacking hope. This was the fourth and last Catholic school door her parents were willing to knock on and expect the answer, “We are sorry. We don’t have the resources to serve your child.” When we answered at St. Claire (pseudonym), Myra’s mother asked, “Will you serve a child with Down syndrome?” I was taken aback by her question and her tear-laden eyes that anticipated a response similar to the ones she had received all week. “If you would give us a chance, we would love to be a part of Myra’s journey,” was my response.

Myra was a gift to us: her tenacity, resilience, and resolve. St. Claire was a better place because of Myra. The process to embrace an inclusive curriculum at St. Claire was a lengthy but

fruitful one. Myra remained at St. Claire for her Kindergarten year after which she transferred to another Catholic school that served a higher population of students with Down syndrome. St. Marian (pseudonym), in the same archdiocese, has said yes to the call of a fully inclusive Catholic school for decades, even before the USCCB (2005a) called for Catholic schools to open its doors and recommit themselves to students marginalized by economics, class and race. Benefiting from the autonomous structure of Catholic schools, Sister Teresa (pseudonym), principal of St. Marian School created the school's inclusion policy and practices based on the framework of Catholic Social Teachings and in consultation with professionals in the field, particularly with a local Catholic university that had spearheaded leadership programs to create fully inclusive Catholic schools.

One of the greatest and lasting experiences of my life was meeting Mother Teresa. I was 13, but I could sense that I was in the presence of a saint. Her spirit exuded the light only a saint's presence can. Her life was an example of leadership spent in service for the poor, sick and destitute. In spite of all the naysayers, and the challenges of living and serving in a developing country, Mother Teresa conducted her service with fearless dedication and tenacity. Even though this servant leader dedicated her life to caring for the downtrodden and the marginalized of the society with the greatest level of kindness, she had held very high expectations from those who worked with her. Her motto, "obedience without delay," was an example of her strong-will, and relentless work ethic that set the foundation for the sisters in her community.

I realized then that my vocation was to provide a safe environment for children and young adults to flourish, build schools that are all inclusive, and focus on personal growth of all. I realized it was my duty to apply my knowledge and professional influence to be a catalyst for

change in the community of Catholic schools. I believe I owe our children the right to a safe and secure environment. I am in the position to right the wrongs, and like Mother Teresa, to relentlessly and unapologetically demand justice for our children. For those who have passed through our gates, and for those yet to come. From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and where they are numerous opportunities to develop, flourish and excel.

Research Study Procedures

Research Study Procedures

Once permission to solicit participation was granted by the Department of Catholic Schools (see Appendix A), a formal invitation was extended to Sister Teresa, principal at St. Marian Catholic elementary school. The invitation was followed by a request for access to the staff, faculty and parents who would be the participants in the research. Sister Teresa wrote a thoughtfully scripted email to the participants seeking their participation in the research. Once this access was gained through Sister Teresa's support all participants in the study were provided an introductory letter (refer to Appendix B), the two-page informed consent form (see Appendix C), and the Subjects' Bill of Rights (see Appendix D). Participants were asked to read, complete, and sign and return to the documents by the time of their interview. The packet provided to the participants also included:

1. The purpose and duration of research activities;
2. A description of any foreseeable risks;
3. A description of any expected benefits;

4. An explanation of who to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research;
5. A statement that participation was voluntary, and refusal to participate or withdraw would involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled; and
6. Information shared in the interviews was anonymous and confidential.

This process was key in establishing legitimacy and credibility to start to earn the trust of the participants. Once a person responded positively to an interview, I thanked them and gave several choices for dates and times convenient to their schedules. All the interviews were conducted virtually and within the span of a month.

Trustworthiness

Trust is an important aspect of the member check process. In addition to using methodological rigor and protocols for semi-structured interviews, trustworthiness was enhanced by including the perspectives of multiple research participants, member checks of interview transcriptions, and the triangulation of data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The goal for this case study was to be mindful of the need for the research to be credible by triangulating data to reveal the "true state of affairs [at St. Marian School] by examining where the different data intersect" (Silverman, 2010, p. 133).

Engaging in peer debriefing helped the researcher test emerging themes but also serve to clarify the researcher's positionality with regard to the data being gathered and the analysis that was being formed. In this case study research, authenticity was attained when the voices most indicative and diverse in the group were heard, included, and acknowledged. There was an

emphasis on documenting the authentic experience of the participants through detailed notation and codification of data. This was also achieved by memo writing that noted the emotions and reactions of the participants during the interviews.

To ensure trust was gained with the participant, prior to each interview, the participants were provided with the interview prompts at least 24 hours for review and reference. Before each interview, the participant was thanked for their time and was provided a summary on the research, and the positionality as a researcher. It was also made it clear that my official position as assistant superintendent within the archdiocese was independent of this case study. I believe this level of transparency was key in establishing a level of trust with the participants.

In addition, I reminded each participant that all information would remain confidential and would never be released in or beyond the research. Through general courtesy, transparency, and availability, I gained their general trust and created a safe, empowering space for them to speak truthfully of their experiences.

One of the important aspects of interviewing the participants of this specific research was providing the time for the participants to reflect and provide their answers. This was especially important as the topic of discussion was their child or student, and the questions were eliciting memories and strong emotions. As the interviewer I respected this natural response by the participants and provided adequate pauses for the participants to gather their thoughts and emotions before moving on to the next question. The participants appreciated this reverence for their personal responses and were at ease to continue with the interviews and offer to participate in follow up interviews if needed. In spite of this offer no follow up interviews were required in the data collection process.

Data Analysis Procedures

Before an in-depth analysis of the narrative data, the data was screened for possible errors that may have occurred in the process of its recording, transcribing, and receiving and organizing the forms. The procedure included the sorting of date by subject and type, the careful reading and re-reading of data until themes related to the research questions emerged, the coding of data once it was organized, and the creation of matrices that illustrated major themes (Hatch, 2002, p. 179).

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Case Study Research

In its essence and nature, qualitative case study research is related to how well an "explanation fits [a] description" (Janesick, 2000, p. 393). Hatch (2002) outlined the following three key elements that are necessary to ensure validity in a qualitative study: (a) using multiple sources of evidence from which to extract meaning, (b) establishing a free-flowing chain of evidence, and (c) having informants review drafts of the study or report to verify that what is being reported is true.

Data Analysis

Findings for this case study were analyzed using inductive analysis. Hatch (2002) stated that inductive analysis and thinking "proceeds from the specific to the general" (p. 161) and that understanding in this method of inquiry is revealed when specific data leads the researcher to discover important themes and patterns emerging organically from the whole, uncovering meaning within a group of people. Inductive analysis allows the researcher to discover meaning by using large sets of data that are gathered using a broad focus. After gathering data, the researcher looks for meaningful patterns by way of discovering links or connections between

specific elements. Hatch (2002) identified the nine different stages of inductive analysis as follows:

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis.
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis.
3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and then put other points aside.
4. Reread data, constantly refining salient domains, while keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data.
5. Decide if domains are either supported or not supported by the data and search the data for examples that either do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains.
6. Complete an analysis within domains.
7. Search for themes across domains.
8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains.
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline. (p. 162)

This process of inductive analysis provides an organized and succinct approach to data interpretation that allows for authentic results and findings to be reported. The data collected from semi-structured interviews, and document analysis was cross referenced and peer debriefing was adopted to check the validity of the study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) described the peer debriefing process as "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308).

List of Codes

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, email correspondence, and so on (Saldana, 2008).

A priori coding was applied in the analysis of this study. This refers to the approach to the data with predetermined set of codes/themes drawn from theoretical framework, literature review, instrument, existing set of codes from other research, et cetera. Priori coding is typically employed when a deductive analysis is conducted in a case study. The following codes were listed to arrive at merging themes and patterns in the data.

- Catholic social teaching*:* CST was the foundation of this research and the theoretical framework based on which this study was developed. It was evident through the data that the participants whole heartedly related to CST as the basis of their calling.
- Mission of Catholic Schools: The basis of the work of the teachers, administrator, staff, and central office staff was strongly rooted in their calling tied to the mission of Catholic schools. This code had a sub code of *Personal Mission*, as number of participants linked their own personal mission to the mission of catholic schools and the mission statement of St. Marian Catholic School. In such a case I selected the code of Mission of *Catholic Schools* and the sub code of *Personal Mission.*
- Inclusion in Catholic Schools*:* The code referred to the current landscape of Inclusion in Catholic schools and the sub code specifically lists the inclusive practices and policies

employed at St. Marian School and the archdiocese, data collection and analysis and educating the community about children with Down syndrome. The blanket code referred to the success and limitations of welcoming students with Down syndrome, the mission of the archdiocese in its support to students with Down syndrome, the landscape of inclusion specifically to the archdiocese and the role of the Department of Catholic Schools and its leadership in the area of inclusion, support to principals, teachers, and parents in the area of professional development, finances, and legal policy mandates.

- Parent choice: Why parents choose Catholic schools was a major aspect of this literature review in this research. This study gathered data related to this factor from the perspective of the administrator, teachers, and parents. The sub codes in this code included some of the reasons why parents choose Catholic schools mainly for the purpose of this study, religious studies and Catholicity, access to general education, mainstream curriculum, experience at other schools and a sense of community.
- Parent challenges: This blanket code focused on the challenges parents face in raising a child with Down syndrome including but not limited to excerpts that related to prejudices against their children due to their condition, the denial of basic rights in healthcare and education, experiences on schools they have attempted to admit their children to prior to St. Marian and the sub codes related directly to financial challenges parents face in admitting their child in Catholic school versus a free public school and the additional financial burdens they have to carry in providing the much needed services to their child.

- Response from stakeholders*:* This code referred to the response from the community, peers, parents, and teachers toward inviting students with Down syndrome at St. Marian School.
- Challenges for Catholic schools: Excerpts from this code included sub codes that related to the challenges Catholic school communities face in serving children with Down syndrome. This included limitations in resources and finances, legal limitations and threat of legal suits, limitations in service to students with Down syndrome, enrollment, and reasons for reluctance of principals for opening their doors to these exceptional learners and finally the expected mastery of skills and standards of students with Down syndrome.
- Response from teachers: Seven of the 11 participants in the study were teachers at St. Marian School. This blanket code included the experience of teachers when they first opened their hearts and doors to welcoming these students into their classrooms, the challenges they faced in saying yes to this mission, their own response to inclusion at St. Marian, how the longevity in their careers related to their service to students with Down syndrome and self-reflection of the success and challenges they faced in fulfilling this mission.
- Benefits to peers: This code referred to how welcome students with Down syndrome felt at St. Marian school and positively benefit their general education peers.
- Culture of caring: This code dealt with excerpts that spoke to the culture at St. Marian school that was immersed in care for students with Down syndrome. This included the environment provided to these students by every member of the school community and the inherent expectation of serving every child at St. Marian with care.

- Qualities of children with Down syndrome: This code related to understanding the qualities, traits, and characteristics that of children with Down syndrome display, which may help enhance or challenge providing services to them in general education classroom.
- Leadership: This code encompassed the role of leadership, namely the principal's leadership, in welcoming students with Down syndrome to St. Marian School. The excerpts related to the mission and vision of the leaders, characteristics of a servant leaders, support provided by the leader to teachers, parents, and the community, and finally the role in creating an inviting atmosphere for all at St. Marian school.
- Message to all: Since the purpose and hope of this study was to encourage and inspire Catholic schools in the archdiocese to open their doors to students with Down syndrome, the excerpts from interviews with the parents related to the message they had for the system and a call to action to become fully inclusive schools and say yes to the mission of Catholic schools steeped in the CST of service to the poor and vulnerable.
- Future of Catholic schools: This code included sub codes that related to what may lie on the future of Catholic schools in their service to students with Down syndrome and included sub codes that related to the plans the Department of Catholic Schools has in supporting the needs and expectations of parents, teachers, and principals in achieving this mission.
- Advocacy for students with Down syndrome: The conversations through interviews with the participants were steeped in emotion and reflection of the journey parents, teachers and administrators took with the children with Down syndrome. This code spoke to the

wish each of these participants had for the future of the children and their role in society based on the foundation they received at St. Marian School.

Coding and Memo Process

Dedoose software was employed to code and create memos from the interview transcripts. The software was critical in organizing and creating related translations and patterns from the information provided through the interview transcripts. The process included uploading the transcript to the software's platform; codes were created from the literature review and other emerging patterns from the excerpts of the interviews.

Memos were created to notate any special notes, responses, emotions the participants displayed or any other non-verbal cues that could not be recorded via the transcript but were important in understanding the context of the participant's answers. For example, if the participant was emotional, slow to respond, hesitated or excited in recalling any memories to respond to the answers.

Credibility

Triangulation and member checks assisted in establishing credibility and contributed to the study's trustworthiness. The process of cross referencing included asking the same research questions of different participants and collect data from different sources through different methods to answer the same questions. Participants generally appreciate the member check process as it gave them an opportunity to verify their statements and fill in any gaps from earlier interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Transferability

Transferability generalizes study findings and attempts to apply them to other situations and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 26). The goal of this study was to allow the findings to effect change in Catholic schools toward including students with Down syndrome. To prove transferability and dependability of the findings, particular attention was paid to systematically and meticulously describe in detail not only the phenomenon of what is happening with the St. Marian's inclusion program but from the point from which it evolved, and from a procedural point of view of what the archdiocese reports should be occurring for students participating in inclusive education. This analysis of the data provided sufficient and informative detail about the context for this research and allows for the researcher to relate the findings of this study to different settings (p. 27).

Confirmability

One of the goals of this study is to conduct further studies that replicate and build on this work. This was achieved by ensuring that the data categories are made internally consistent. Lincoln and Guba (2000) stated that researchers must devise rules that describe category properties and that can, ultimately, be used to justify the inclusion of each data bit that remains assigned to the category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability. All attempts were made so other researchers will be able to replicate the results to show that those results are a product of independent research methods and not of conscious or unconscious bias.

Participants

Part of the interview protocol elicited personal information from the participants that related to gender, age, race, educational background, years of service in education, professional

backgrounds, and years of service at St. Marian school. Through their narratives, participants revealed their personal information such as gender, race, and years of service at St. Marian School, educational and professional background.

The participants included one administrator, one staff member, eight teachers who currently, or in the past have served students with Down syndrome and four parents of students with Down syndrome who are currently enrolled at St. Marian school. One assistant superintendent at the Department of Catholic Schools who is responsible for the leadership in the field of inclusion was also interviewed.

Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 65 years of age. Years of service at St. Marian ranged from 4 years to 30 years. All faculty members earned their master's degrees from Loyola Marymount University. All but the administrator did not earn a formal degree in Special Education. Participants consisted of three Caucasian (White) and twelve participants of Hispanic (Latinx) descent. The parents interviewed had children with Down syndrome in the age range of 6 to 10 years of age, in grade levels third and fourth grade. All parents interviewed were Hispanic (Latinx) in descent, Catholics attending other parishes beside St. Marian's home parish and lived beyond the immediate geographic vicinity of St. Marian School. The distance of their residences to St. Marian School ranged between 15 to 30 miles.

The following list of participants consists entirely of pseudonyms identifying the position at St. Marian School they served at the time of the interview. Other identifiable information is not listed or discussed as individuals. The participants in this study are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Description

Name	Title	Unique characteristics
Sister Teresa	Principal	• Religious sister over 18 years of service at St. Marian School • Master's in Inclusion Studies
Maria	Staff member	Main liaison for parents
Claire	Teacher	Master's in Education
Lisa	Teacher	Master's in Education
Amaya	Teacher	Master's in Education
Rachel	Teacher	Master's in Education
Tara	Teacher	Master's in Education
Anita	Teacher	Master's in Education
Mr. and Mrs. Lopez	Parents to Arianna	Master's in Education
Mrs. Vasquez	Parent to Xavier	Master's in Education
Mrs. Perez	Parent to Jackie	Master's in Education
Allison	Assistant Superintendent	• Inclusion Specialist at the Department of Catholic Schools • Doctorate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

Ethical Considerations

The foundation of qualitative research is based on a relationship of closeness and trust between the researcher and participant. Creswell (2013) asserted that ethical consideration happens at all stages of research beyond data collection. Considering this research delved into the lives of the participants and their service to children with Down syndrome, there was inherent expectation from the beginning of the process that the discussion and disclosures would be

emotionally challenging. The questions encouraged the participants to be honest with their success and also critical of the needs that have not been served. It was therefore crucial as a researcher to consider the participants' fear of disclosing information, supporting their thought processes, evaluate their own situations, allowing adequate pauses for regaining their composure or possibly delaying the interview and finally assuring them of the confidentiality of their identity. It may be noted that my current role in the archdiocese may have also stood as an impediment in gathering honest data especially when it related to the participants being critical of the archdiocese.

All the participants interviewed were adults and consented to the interview by signing an approved consent form by the IRB. Prior to each interview the participant agreed to being recorded for the purpose of this study and were provided detailed objective and purpose of the study and their right to stop the recording at any time should the process become difficult to continue.

Confidentiality

The protection of subjects is an important part of the study. Participants were assured of their protection by not presenting identifiable information in the explication of the data. Participants are referred to with pseudonyms and generalized titles. None of the data will reveal the participants' personal information or identifiers. All the participants who were invited to participate in the study eagerly accepted the invitation to be interviewed and responded positively to participate in the study. There were no evident or potential risks predicted in participating in this study but the option to opt out or cease the interviews at any time during the process was constantly offered to the participants. Considering the emotional nature of the study

and the expectation that the questions would elicit an emotional response from the participants, adequate breaks, and options to reschedule the interviews were also offered to the participants. Even though the emotional nature of the interviews was visible and notable, none of the participants requested for breaks or suggested to reschedule the interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, safety guidelines dictated the process used to conduct the interviews. All the interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom software that recorded and transcribed the interviews. Participants consent was sought prior to the recording of each interview. Member checks were conducted by circulating transcribed interviews with the participants seeking any suggested edits. Participants were provided 2 weeks to provide their responses. None of the participants had any edits on the transcriptions provided.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the development of this case study, describing its design, procedures, and basic methodology. The research was conducted with a lens of grounded theory, aimed to help to translate participants' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of inclusive education at St. Marian's school, with a goal to better serve students with Down syndrome.

To arrive at this goal, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were adopted to cross-reference the data and arrive at the story that will provide foundational support for other Catholic schools.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to provide Catholic K-12 educators, administrators, families, and parish communities with an understanding of the critical elements to implement effective, inclusive schools and classrooms for all students, particularly those students with Down syndrome by examining how one Catholic elementary school serves this vulnerable population. This study hopes to inform educational leaders on employing policies and procedures aligned with CST which will result in creating welcoming, effective, and safe learning environments for students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools. This study will ultimately provide data to those in similar Catholic school settings who are developing and implementing similar inclusive practices. It will also serve as a guide for Catholic schools and contribute to filling the research gap in the field of inclusion of students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools.

The significance of this case study was in witnessing and documenting one elementary Catholic school's experience of creating, developing, establishing, and modeling an inclusion program that serves the needs of students with Down syndrome. The case study included semi-structured interviews with the principal, faculty, staff, parents, and Department of Catholic School employees. Document reviews included a review of church documents, archdiocesan documents and documents and artifacts at the school site.

From this research emerged over 20 hours of recorded semi-structured interviews, 678 significant statements, 435 excerpts from 38 codes, and 23 code applications.

This chapter is organized in two sections. The first section describes how the study was conducted at St. Marian Catholic elementary school. This includes a brief introduction of the participants and the documents that were analyzed in the research process. The second section describes the themes that emerged from the interviews with participants and their responses to the questions.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research questions for this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature on inclusion in Catholic schools and were developed naturally based on what issues about disability and inclusive education at St. Marian Catholic elementary school were examined (Berg, 2004).

1. How does a Catholic elementary school serve its students with Down syndrome?
2. What are the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school?

How the Study Was Conducted

St. Marian Catholic elementary school was chosen as the research site using a convenient and purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is used when a densely information-rich case is chosen for an in-depth and intensive study (Patton, 2002). The primary reason for selecting St. Marian was its focus on serving students with Down syndrome when many of the Catholic schools in the archdiocese were not inclusive at this level. In my own experience and knowledge as an assistant superintendent for Catholic schools there are currently fewer than five elementary schools in the archdiocese that operate schools that serve students with Down syndrome. The research question was best suited to the inquiry made at this school site and the

information and data gathered was significant in creating landmark and foundational cases for all the schools in the archdiocese.

Data Gathering

This study used the following qualitative methods of data collection to answer the research questions: semi-structured interviews and analysis of documents and archival data. This multiple method approach of data collection assisted in "validating and clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443), while investigating the academic and social experiences of inclusion participants. Focusing on collecting data to gather responses on the research questions, the interview questions spoke to the attitudes and experiences of the administrator, staff, faculty, and parents of St. Marian School toward children with Down syndrome. All interview protocols were semi-structured to allow for impromptu elaboration and the freedom to expand upon topics that unexpectedly emerged and were relevant to the study.

Data Explication

These semi-structured, qualitative interviews were explicated through Dedoose software. Using the software helped code excerpts from transcripts that formed clusters of meaning and to further build on the recurring themes. Memos were made for excerpts to note reactions, context and general tone and nuance of the way the interviewee responded to the questions. Significant statements were organized and analyzed by themes and sub constructs. The responses related to other significant statements to build up each theme. This process of explication is explained in Chapter 3.

Emerging Themes of the Research

Out of the 12 interviews totaling over 20 hours, 230 significant statements were extracted. These statements have been categorized into six overarching themes that speak to the research questions and examine how one Catholic elementary school operates an inclusive Catholic school that serves at least five students with Down syndrome. Administrators, staff, teachers, and parents reflected on their experiences and shared their personal stories.

These case study findings can be explained through the emergence of three major themes for research question one. The data states that St. Marian School serves its students with Down syndrome by: (a) developing a shared framework (b) instituting a culture for collaboration; and (c) providing student supports and opportunities that are inclusive in nature.

For research question two the following three themes emerged that responded to challenges in serving students with Down syndrome: (a) resources and supports, (b) continued professional development opportunities, and (c) advocacy and the continuation of care in Catholic schools.

Developing a Shared Framework

Pope Francis calls onto us to pay attention to people at the margins of society, to meet them, know them, include them, and serve them. In his address to Participants in the Convention for Persons with Disabilities, promoted by the Italian Episcopal Conference, Francis (2015b) stated:

> Our communities are still struggling to practice true inclusion, full participation that finally becomes ordinary, normal. And this requires not only technical and specific programs, but first, recognition and acceptance of faces, tenacious and patient confidence that each person is unique and unrepeatable. (p. 26)

The main elements of Catholic education include the capability of Catholic schools to accommodate educational change, adapting to new pedagogical styles, a focus to infuse the Gospel message in all settings, and openness to culture and to a plurality of perspectives (Martin & Litton, 2004). The community of St. Marian elementary school has heeded to the call from Pope Francis, as the principal, staff, teachers, and parents have created an environment that serves the most vulnerable in our society and has strived to make full inclusion normal and ordinary.

Focusing on a Shared Mission

There was a collective and resounding response from the principal, staff, and teachers on how the mission statement of St. Marian School was the overarching basis and foundation of their existence. As stated by the principal, Sr. Teresa, the mission statement was adopted over 20 years ago, has been revisited multiple times but has never been altered: "The conversations were very emotional, and tears were shed. But it is very, very simple, you know. The mission statement speaks to who we really are."

There was evident confidence reflected in the interviews that all the teachers and parents accorded credence to the principal for opening the doors of St. Marian and living out the mission of the school. On speaking with the principal, she recounted her experiences of creating a fully inclusive school with much humility and introspectiveness. As a novitiate religious she had various opportunities to volunteer and serve vulnerable communities in the United States and around the world. She was most profoundly inspired by her experience of volunteering at a summer camp that served children with Down syndrome. "It was just interesting how easy it was to grow to love children with Down syndrome," said Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian. This

experience left an abiding impression on her and remained with her as she led the school for over 18 years. It is this notable experience that Sister Teresa acknowledges to be the motivation to invite students with Down syndrome to her school, and she always aspired and prayed that she would be able to effectuate that mission one day. Reflecting to that moment she shared, “In my conversations with God, I finally found my mission and purpose. I prayed a child with Down syndrome who needed our love would come to us. Be careful what you ask for,” delightfully shared Maria, a staff member at St. Marian. “Sister’s prayers were answered. We got a call from our first student with Down syndrome.” There was an elevated level of joy when both Sister Teresa and Maria recollected on the dawn of full inclusion at St. Marian. Their beatitude and elation were palpable. “Jesus made it clear; let the children come to me. And if Jesus had a choice, He would go for the most vulnerable first. Can you imagine us saying no to that?” stated Sister Teresa emphatically, as she displayed exuberant confidence in her calling and the calling of the staff and faculty she leads. Even though the leadership of Sister Teresa was strongly evident in the conception of the program and its success, it was also evident that the teachers strongly believed and supported the mission of the school and took pride in adopting it as their own. It is worthy to mention that the years of service of the teachers and staff ranged between 4 years to 30 years, but the ownership of the school’s mission was equally owned by all. As a novice teacher shared, “It is right there in our mission statement. It is our duty to serve everyone and God needed us for that purpose.” A similar sentiment was shared by a veteran teacher of over 20 years of service at St. Marian. She said, “We are unique. We are living our mission statement. We just don’t just read it or say it. We believe in it. We all live it.”

The participants' Catholic faith and their collective mission as Catholic school teachers was also a common reason to be open to serving students with Down syndrome. Often participants could not disassociate their personal mission, the mission of the school and their calling as Catholics and Catholic school teachers. "It's part of my faith and love for God and everything He created, God brought me here," emphatically stated Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian. Teaching at St. Marian was visible less as a job and more of a calling and vocation. "I always wanted to be a teacher. That was my passion and I love it. These children (children with Down syndrome) make me a better Catholic and a better teacher." This passionate statement was made by Claire, a teacher at St. Marian, when asked why she chose to teach as a career. Rachel, a teacher, echoed this position with a similar response saying,

> We have a mission statement that tells us that we are here for a reason, you know. I have a mission. And the Holy Spirit will guide us. We just have to say yes and be open minded. What would I want for my own children? Would people open doors for my children? It has to start with me. I need to open my heart for these children. I have to.

When discussing the benefits of being a teacher by profession, all the teachers noted how Catholic school teachers aren't always paid like their public-school counterparts but the ability to teach religion in their classrooms and be part of a family like environment where everyone cares for each other is what really keeps them inspired. "I am never going to be rich, but that's okay," said Claire, and added with visible gratification, "I am rewarded with love every day."

The mission statement of the school is a definitive document that guides and directs the operations at St. Marian School. A strong affinity to their mission and obedience without delay to their calling was succinctly stated by Claire, a teacher at St. Marian, when she said, "I have to

say yes. This is what we do. This is what is expected of us. This is our mission." The leadership of the principal and the love for the mission is what really shepherds this school community to a place it wants to be, and that sentiment echoed in all the conversations that took place with the participants.

Focusing on a Unified Vernacular

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (*New King James Version*, n.d., Matthew 19:14). This was an invitation to all, especially, the marginalized, the vulnerable, the poor in spirit, the suffering, the meek, those seeking righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for the sake of righteousness; all these will be called children of God (*New King James Version*, n.d., Matthew 5:3-10).

Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, found her calling in bible verse, "Let all the children come to me." She said, "We can't say no because Jesus didn't say no to anyone. He said, let all the children come to me. Not some children, but all the children." What was apparent from all these interviews pertinent to this specific saying was that Jesus emulated what inclusion really meant. This was the primal definition of inclusion based on the Catholic faith and the mission of the Catholic Church. An inclusion of all persons including children. The principal, staff and teachers all believed that it was their duty and responsibility to follow the model that Jesus had provided and present that in their own actions by creating a fully inclusive environment at St. Marian. They unanimously subscribed to this expectation without forging any exceptions. "God brought them to us for a reason. We have to make it work. God will make it work," said Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, with complete conviction in her faith and the mission of the school.

The commitment to inclusive education, a history of serving the marginalized, and the autonomy to create communities that support all learners allows St. Marian School to serve students with special needs, especially children with Down syndrome, and furthermore heed the call based on the Catholic Social Teachings, that are foundational teachings of the Catholic Church. Even though the participants did not specifically cite the CST, the affiliation to its tenets of the Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Call to Family, Community and Participation, and Option for the Poor and Vulnerable were fully perceptible in the conversations that took place Bonfiglio et al. (2019). The principal and teachers principally believed that the CST were foundational to their work, but the provision of a welcoming learning space for children with Down syndrome was a civil right the children were entitled to.

The community of St. Marian embodied the CST in its essence. “I don’t care how much money they have. Their disabilities are irrelevant. I just want to give them the space,” said Sr. Teresa. She always welcomed the poor, the marginalized and the vulnerable. Official documents including budgets, financial reports and correspondence certify the invitation of a Catholic education to anyone who chooses to receive it. Families were not turned away because they could not afford the tuition or the additional demands of enrolling a child at a Catholic school. “Sister never says no. She will find a way and we just follow her,” said staff member Maria. “But serving the poor was not where my purpose should end. I wanted to open our doors to everyone who wanted to be part of our school,” said Sister Teresa, as she reflected on how Catholic schools should go beyond fulfilling the mission of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the saint to first establish Catholic schools, to serve the poor and those marginalized by race, ethnicity, social, immigrant and financial status. As Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian, put it, “The main thing is

that we accept any child, no matter what their ability." A similar sentiment was echoed by her coworker, Amaya, "Include everyone and love all of them. It is that simple."

These teachers, staff and principal were doing extraordinary work as evidenced in the various academic, financial and data recorded at the archdiocesan level. But the simplicity and humility that was witnessed during the conversations was noteworthy. Inclusion was not deemed as a choice but as an expectation of themselves as Catholic school educators. This state of mind was succinctly stated by Sister Teresa who said, "I just never shut up about inclusion. It is what I am called to do."

Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students with community membership and greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. Research shows that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum and as reflected in the interviews with the participants in this study, has been one of the main reasons parents choose to send their children to Catholic school.

Interviewing the parents of children with Down syndrome was an emotional experience. The parents thoughtfully reflected on their journey of having a child with Down syndrome to arriving and making a home at St. Marian Catholic School. One question the parents responded to emphatically was their choice of a Catholic school for their Down syndrome child. The parents were acutely aware that St. Marian did not have a history of serving children with Down syndrome, the teachers did not hold degrees in special education and there were no specialized supports available at St. Marian that their children may possibly avail at public schools. Despite this awareness they were confident that a Catholic school was the ideal place for their Down

syndrome children. Jackie, a student with Down syndrome at St. Marian's parents made the following assertion when asked about why they chose to enroll their child in a Catholic school:

> I know we could go elsewhere, and we did. But it wasn't like this. She is wanted here. Not just tolerated, wanted. I cannot get that anywhere else. We were in a public school. I could not get communication like this. I just couldn't. Everything needed to be on paper and everything had to be part of her Independent Educational Plan [IEP]. I had to educate myself about the law or get a lawyer to help my own child.

These parents relayed their experience in public schools and other Catholic schools. Two of the parents shared that their children were placed in a public school's special education program that served children with severe disabilities. "She was not severely disabled. She tested low on her test, but her abilities were much greater. She was not learning at all. We couldn't leave her there," said Ariana's parents as they recalled on their experience at a local public school. Ariana is a child with Down syndrome who currently attends St. Marian. She arrived at St. Marian with certain physical challenges that required assistive supports from her mother who accompanied Arianna in the classroom.

"I did not want a segregated classroom for my daughter. She belonged with all the other children. She really did," confidently stated Jackie's mother. Jackie, a child with Down syndrome also arrived at St. Marian after her parents learned about the program through the National Catholic Board on Inclusion, a non-profit that supports parents seeking an all-inclusive Catholic school education for their children. Like the three other parents, Jackie's mom rated accessibility to a general education classroom as her first reason to choose a catholic education for her child. The other top reasons were as follows: the sense of community at the school, faith

and religious studies, and access to a challenging curriculum. Ariana's mother said the following:

> I want her to have the full exposure she did not get at the public school. I don't want her to supervise every step of the way. Even to go the bathroom with an adult, sitting in between two aides. The supervision was to the point of policing. I don't want that for her. When they walked anywhere, they had to grab a rope to keep them in line. She did not need that. That didn't work for me. I know what I want for my daughter. I need her to learn to be independent.

Jackie's mother was very certain on why she transferred her daughter from a local public school to Catholic school. She believed that public schools did offer a well written supportive program on paper and had the additional resources a student with Jackie's needs would require but her in-person experience was not what she wanted for her child. Being part of a general education classroom was very important for her. Working with other children and being exposed to challenges like a general education child would be key to all these parents. "These children (children with Down syndrome) only look different from the other children, but they learn like everyone else. They don't need to be separated from everyone else," said Arianna's parents. Their experience was very similar to Jackie's family. Arianna was placed in a classroom for severely disabled students and the parents were allowed no access to the teacher or administrator without any written requests. All information had to be shared formally and often via the school district's special education office. Arianna's parents saw Arianna regressing in her learning and her social skills:

She stopped talking like used to. She did not seem happy at all and we couldn't help her. We were told this was our only choice because they [public school] had everything she needed. But she [Arianna] was falling behind.

I grew up public [school]. I really, honestly didn't even know that Catholic schools existed till I went to catechism class and there I met Maria [the staff member from St. Marian]. She told us that St. Marian was an inclusion school. I was so happy. I talked to my husband and the following Monday all my three children were attending St. Marian. My whole life had changed. I wish I knew earlier.

The quote exemplified Xavier's parents' exposure to Catholic education. Xavier, a child with Down syndrome had never been enrolled in a public school and the parents repeatedly expressed that they were blessed to make the acquaintance with Maria and found a faith community that had accepted all their children. "They treat them all the same. Everybody at that school so loves to the kids, the parents, the staff. Everybody. That's beautiful."

For all the parents interviewed, finding a school that valued their children was what they were seeking. "They just want acceptance. And now they are part of a group, part of a community. We want to provide them that space," conveyed Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian.

It was also evident through the interviews that all the participants believed that religion and faith played an important role in why parents chose to bring their children to a Catholic school. "I would say because of their faith. They want their faith to be instilled in their children. That option should be open to all families. It was open to me" affirmed Anita, a teacher at St. Marian whose children attended Catholic schools.

Maria, staff member at St. Marian, is often the first person who families make contact with when they consider admission to the school. She pointedly stated, “Our faith and Sacraments are not reserved for the abled. Jesus wanted them for all children. We do everything to make that happen at our school.” Unfortunately, that was not the case for all Catholic schools and parishes as found in an interview with Allison from the Department of Catholic schools. “Children with special needs are expected to fulfill the same requirements as everybody else. And this can result in the child not making their first communion or confirmation.” At St. Marian, the entire community was proud to witness the children with Down syndrome receive their Sacraments. Amaya, one of the teachers responsible to prepare students for their Sacraments shared:

> All our students can receive the sacraments. We don’t put hurdles in their way. They get cue cards to remember their prayers if they need them. We support them however we can. Our pastor says, as long as the children know the host is Jesus when it is consecrated then they are good to go.

When the teachers were asked why parents choose a Catholic education for their children with the clear awareness that there is a possible lack of resources or teachers with special education degrees, the teachers agreed unanimously that all parents deserved to choose a catholic education for all their children. Amaya, a teacher who has been very involved with sacramental preparation said:

> Well, I think, as always, it should be a parents’ choice. And if a parent wants their child to have not only the academics but the spirituality too, then they should have that choice to be with their peers. To go through the journey

together. Communion and maybe confirmation. Why deny them that right? Why not let them grow up together with Jesus?

It is meaningful to note that in all the interviews the principal, staff, teachers, and parents recognized the effect the introduction to faith at St. Marian had on Xavier, a child with Down syndrome at St. Marian. “Xavier wants to a be priest one day. How would that happen anywhere else? You know maybe he will be the first priest with Down syndrome!” proudly shared Xavier’s mother. “Every morning it’s never like we don’t want to go to school today. The first thing that comes out of his [Xavier’s] mouth is, is there church today?”

“It’s like seeing our job get done when we saw him receive his First Communion,” said a very emotional Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian who had previously taught Xavier. “He [Xavier] looked as proud as he walked up to receive communion. We were all in tears. We were so proud,” shared Maria, a staff member, while recalling the momentous day Xavier received his first holy communion.

Most of the teachers credited the Catholic school choice to the basic expectation of parents to keep all their children together at one school site. “Parents want their family together. Why would we want to separate them?” maintained Anita, a teacher at St. Marian, who felt honored for being part of the full inclusion program since its inception. “Parents just want the same opportunities for their child. An equal system. It’s that simple,” remarked Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, who recalled her own conversations with parents on their journey and experience that brought them to St. Marian. She went on to disclose how important it was for parents to keep their children together in one school. “How can we separate a family?” she said.

Guidance and Support Provided by a Servant Leader

Servant leaders make a conscious choice to serve first. They place the good of followers over the leaders' self-interests. They build strong relationships with others, are empathetic and ethical, and lead in ways that serve the greater good of followers, the organization, the community, and society at large (Northouse, 2018). Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian, dedicated her life to caring and serving the most vulnerable in our society. She embodies servant leadership in how emphatically she serves all the children in her care. The foundation of her work is based on the relationships with the community she serves and places their good above all else. Sr. Teresa's vocational journey started early in her life, took her around the world and finally brought her to the doors of St. Marian where she has served in the capacity of principal for the past 18 years. There is considerable testimony of Sr. Teresa's leadership in the area of inclusion at St. Marian and in the archdiocese. "Sr. Teresa is just awesome at what she does. You can just tell that inclusion is important to her. Those kids are important to her," said Allison, a representative from the archdiocese. These testimonies were repeated time and again in the interview with the staff, teachers, and parents.

Crediting the service to children with Down syndrome at St. Marian to the efforts of Sr. Teresa, Anita, a teacher who has worked with Sr. Teresa for a significant number of years, said, "You know, Sr. Teresa lights a fire in all of us." She went on to say how Sr. Teresa's tenacity is so infectious and her excitement so palpable that the teachers are engrossed into that same spirit and are inspired take on such new and worthy endeavors. "It all started with Sr. Teresa" said Lisa, one of Anita's colleagues at St. Marian. "I will never forget the day she came to me and asked if I would be okay with having a student with Down syndrome in my classroom. I could

not believe I was being given this opportunity." Lisa recalled this conversation reverently and she shared how touched she was with Sr. Teresa's gesture, and how privileged she felt to be invited on this unique journey.

The participants were keen in noting Sr. Teresa's leadership especially in her behavior that reflected servant leadership. Her role in the emotional healing for the children and parents who finally arrived at St. Marian after a series of rejections they experienced elsewhere. "Sr. Teresa is the first person they meet when they come here. So, I think by being so welcoming the parents finds themselves at ease," said Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian. One teacher noted that her own children attended St. Marian under different leadership and at that point in time the school wasn't serving students with special needs, least of all, children with Down syndrome. "Sr. Teresa had a dream of welcoming these children. She opened the doors."

While accomplishing great feats is a common characteristic of leadership, accomplishing great feats while caring and empowering those around you is a characteristic behavior of a servant leader. It was learned from all the interviews that Sr. Teresa always put her community first. She continues to empower and create value in the community, which has resulted in the school and community's growth, improved performance, and strong societal impact. Even though the teachers looked up to Sr. Teresa as a leader they also found in her a confidant, a guide, and admired her caring disposition toward them all. "I credit this whole thing to Sr. Teresa. She's the one. She is our rock. She is the one who endorses all our work. She has had a special place in my heart for a very long time," fondly shared Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian also shared the following words that were punctuated with moments of admiration and endearment for Sr. Teresa. She said:

> I think everything started with Sr. Teresa. I mean she is so wonderful inside and out. Without her, none of this would exist. Maybe we would not have been this open-minded. She truly gives us all the strength. Besides being my boss, she is also my spiritual guide.

The parents and teachers alike recognized and acknowledged Sr. Teresa's leadership in establishing a culture of care at St. Marian. Xavier's parents shared this:

> Sr. Teresa is just great. Overall, she has done so much for these kids. She provides so much information. She helps us out so much and she just broke down everything for us. She showed us how everything was going to be for Xavier. I just felt like I could trust her. She just makes you feel like that.

Although there is ubiquitous acknowledgement of Sr. Teresa's leadership from the community at St. Marian, Sr. Teresa attributes the culture and success at St. Marian to the entire school community. A true characteristic of a servant leader. This is simply reflected in the following statement Sr. Teresa made: "You know what it is, the whole team works together, that I can say. Our attribution is that we are all on the same mission."

Developing a Mission Aligned With the Catholic Social Teachings

Catholic social teaching, an integral part of Catholic education (Bryk et al., 1993), is a doctrine developed by the Catholic Church regarding social justice, social organization, and the state's responsibility to take care of its people. Scanlan (2009c) identified CST as the foundation for the implementation of inclusive teaching practices in schools. Catholic Social Teaching is a body of teaching which is heavily dependent on sacred scripture but is also engrossed in Pope authored encyclicals and letters dating back to 1891. In his apostolic letter Pope Paul VI issued (1971) a call to action where he stated:

> It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. (pp. 47-48)

In this study, the mission of Catholic schools encompassed the personal mission of the participants that was strongly rooted in the Catholic social teachings. Even though the participants did not markedly name the teachings, the explanation and relation to CST was clearly evident in their responses. In the excerpts coded with Catholic identity, 33 of the excerpts related to CST.

This theme also represents an ardent effort on behalf of the community of St. Marian Catholic school as it appeals to our Catholic school system to ensure that children with Down syndrome are welcomed as full participants and experience a true belonging in Catholic schools. So as to not subdue the impassioned and fervent posture displayed by the participants these excerpts will be shared in their words.

Claire, a teacher at St. Marian made the following statement emphatically as she reflected on her own personal evolution as a teacher and a Catholic. Her message to all her fellow Catholic school educators was this:

> We are going to have to evolve. We're going to have to change. We are going to have to say yes to the children with Down syndrome and to children with special needs. To everyone I say, don't be afraid. I know it's scary. It's scary in the beginning because you really don't know what you're doing. But you will figure it out as you go along. We did and we got really good at it.

Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, reminisced about the first day of welcoming a child with Down syndrome in her classroom when she made this call to all the administrators and teachers in the Catholic school system:

> Just don't say no. It's never a good feeling to feel rejected. Nobody deserves that. We have opened our doors to everyone, even those who may not be able to afford it. Poverty, social status, economic or academic ability should not decide the future of these children. It's not fair. It not just and it's not okay. It just isn't.

Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian accorded that administrators and principals will have to be the authors of change if we want to see Catholic school transform into fully inclusive environments. Her call to action was directed toward administrators when she said:

> We need to start the process of change from the top. From the administration. If the administration does not have an open heart, then the teachers will not either. I have seen it. Our target has to be to change the hearts of the administrators to let them know that this can be done. We can all become fully inclusive Catholic schools who welcome all children. Let them all come to me said Jesus, and now it needs to say by our leaders.

Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian spent a few thoughtful moments in self-reflection before she shared her message and to call to action to the system. She wanted to make sure that her message was one that appealed to all school communities while it also inspired the hope such a message brings. She said:

> Teaching children with Down syndrome is going to change your life. Even if you are not willing to accept it, it will. It's because these children teach us more than we teach them. Just by how they enter our classroom daily with the biggest smiles and the kindest hearts.

> They have this energy that lights up the room. How can we not open our hearts to that? And I know for some people this will not be enough. They are afraid. But I think people just assume that children with Down syndrome have limitations, but they don't. They work very hard and if somebody gives them a chance, they surprise all of us. Like something we thought they couldn't do, and they just do it. And that's what has changed me by meeting them and becoming a better teacher.

Maria, a staff member at St. Marian, championed the theory of full inclusion into practice when she answered the first call from a parent with a child with Down syndrome. Her actions thereafter paved the path for numerous families as they found a home for themselves and their children at St. Marian. Her message to the system was one of unity. She strongly believed that a unified mission could allow for a greater and much stronger system for all schools:

> This only works when we all believe that it will work. Everyone needs to buy into the program. We all, as Catholic schools, need to have one common mission statement and that is to serve all children. It is possible. It isn't that hard. But we cannot do it alone. We cannot become success stories alone. We need to do this together, and we can do this together.

Anita, also a teacher at St. Marian, witnessed her own methodology and teaching techniques evolve pursuant to her becoming a teacher to children with Down syndrome. She took great pride in the foundational training she received, and she stood steadfast to those teachings, but she took even greater pride knowing that a few children with big smiles and kind hearts could challenge her to become a better teacher even at the apex of her teaching career. When

asked how additional schools in the archdiocese can be invited and inspired to open their doors to children with Down syndrome, she provided this possible road map:

> I would reiterate our mission statement. Really, if every school said that we are here to love one another and the help each person become the person God intended them to be. If we all believed in this then we would all be able to welcome all of God's children. All schools are capable of doing this; they just have to be on the same page as long as they believe in themselves. We may not always know what to do but we can figure it out together. The mission is real here. It has truly come alive. I consider myself an old schoolteacher. I was taught and trained by the nuns, her and at my previous school. I think I am very strict, and I have very high expectations of all my students. So, if I could change and find myself learning more and becoming a more understanding teacher then it's possible for all. We can all make it possible.

Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian, believed that it was divine intervention that ushered her to St. Marian Catholic School. She often stated how she was meant to be at St. Marian and how her life changed when it intersected with the lives of children with Down syndrome. Her call to action to other teachers and principals was one seeped in optimism and prospect:

> Just embrace these children. Embrace them with an open heart and an open mind. It's doable. You can do it. You just need to manage the work and figure it out. It's not that hard. And then it will come naturally. It's just beautiful. You will see. We also need to get the word out to let people know. There is no reason why we should turn anyone away. And when I do hear stories like that it just breaks my heart. We need to help the parents

who are lost because they have nowhere to go. We need to help those parents who are lost and who have given up. It is very important that we give them the hope.

The parents of children with Down syndrome shared their own experiences of being part of the family of Catholic schools and had a deep gratitude for the opportunity their children received at St. Marian School. Despite their experiences of repudiation from other Catholic schools the parents were hopeful that the example of full inclusion at St. Marian will inspire their schools to follow suit. Xavier's mother made an emotional invocation to the system when she said this:

> You need to give them all a chance. Trust me, you will not regret saying yes to these kids. Just open your hearts. The children should lose the opportunity because of their disability. We are all human and these are just kids. I know there is some fear but that shouldn't keep us from doing the right thing or at least trying.

Jackie's mother implored all Catholic schools to reconsider their calling and take steps, even small ones to become fully inclusive schools. She said:

> What is God asking us to do? Welcome all the children. Then we should welcome all the children. He is asking us to welcome all the children, not the child, you know, who is very smart or the one who has lots of money. And once we are there, and then let's figure it out. And if doesn't work, it doesn't work. But the main thing is to at least give it a chance. At least try to figure it out. I just want my daughter to be wanted just like my other kids. That's it. Just the same exposure and the same opportunity.

Sister Teresa, principal at St. Marian Catholic School has been an advocate for fully inclusive schools and believes that leading by example may inspire other schools to follow suit.

Her call to action to other principal companions was an appeal to run to the basics to challenges schools to reflect on the teachings of the church and make all attempts to live up to those teachings:

> You know, I think we have a great system. I think the Catholic school system is really great. We all do such great work. But I think sometimes we get caught up with rules and laws and are afraid of getting sued and that's what binds us. But that can happen with any situation and any child. Our vocation and calling needs to set us free from that bind. We just need to go back to the basics, you know. Go back to the teachings of Jesus.

Instituting a Culture of Collaboration

Noddings (2016) said:

> Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the others. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves. (p. 14)

Mayeroff (2009) said that to care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help that person grow and actualize themselves. This section will expand on how the community cared for the children of Down syndrome and their families. How this ethic of caring was built on the foundation of their own instinct of natural caring and how this culture of care helps the students to grow and actualize themselves. The culture of care theme had 83 matching excerpts.

The teachers at St. Marian have all earned their Master's in Education with one study unit in special education. Their years of service at St. Marian range from 4 year to 30 years. Between the principals, office staff member and one veteran teacher there is a collective service of over

100 years. At first look it can be assumed that teacher longevity may be the reason the school environment is steeped in care for generations. But as interviews continued it was evident that school faculty consisted of teachers who were novices in this career and had been full time faculty for only 3 to 4 years. To understand how these teachers responded to the call of serving students with Down syndrome and supporting the mission of the school, the teachers were asked to share their first-hand experience of teaching children with Down syndrome who were considered exceptional learners. The response to this question demonstrated the privilege and honor these teachers felt when asked to welcome and serve the most vulnerable. Understandably, there was a sense of apprehensiveness when they started this journey but despite of it, the response was an overwhelmingly and assenting, yes. This was evident when Lisa, a teacher at. St Marian said, "Working with children with Down syndrome, it is a been a blessing beyond words." And an identical thought was reiterated by a colleague, Claire, who said, "You know teachers here [at St. Marian] don't think they are saying yes. We just think this is what we are. This is what we do."

The teachers reminisced to the time when they were first invited by their principal to teach students with Down syndrome. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, shared:

> I stayed up all night looking at all my papers and preparing for her [Jackie, student with Down syndrome]. I watched some videos. Some of them even made me cry, you know. I just told Sr. Teresa in the morning, I just want to tell you that, thank you so much for choosing me.

Rachel was informed about welcoming a student with Down syndrome a day before the child was arriving at St. Marian School and this is no way perturbed Rachel and her zeal to

welcome the child. Rachel shared how she was nervous about this new endeavor, but she had children of her own and she would not think twice about welcoming a child into the school, especially one who needed her help to grow and thrive. Anita, a teacher at St. Marian, who was also welcoming a child with Down syndrome for the first time in her career shared her own personal experience.

I was very nervous because she [a student with Down syndrome] was my first. When I homeschooled my own children, there was a boy in the class who had Down syndrome and he was the sweetest little thing. So that's what I went off of. That's all I knew about children with Down syndrome. I even contacted his mother to ask for her help. That was it.

All the teachers made a personal connection to why they responded so positively to serving children with Down syndrome despite it being their first experience and knowing the challenges they may possibly face. But they strongly believed that it was their duty and not obligation to be charged with the protection, welfare, and maintenance of children with Down syndrome. This is what they believed true caring meant. They did not heed to this calling as a matter of obligation but as a latent instinct of natural caring. This was apparent when Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, shared her first-hand experience of serving a child with Down syndrome for the first time.

I mean it was scary at first; I am not going to lie. It was my first year and I met with the parents, and they were very straightforward and even that was scary. At time I think they were even in defense mode. But I understood why. It was my first-time teaching [omitted] grade. I had no experience prior to that.

The consciousness of personal duty and obedience came organically to these teachers. None of them shared an ounce of doubt or reluctance to the resolution they had taken collectively, and they were determined to succeed. When prompted to respond to their awareness of how these children were rejected by other Catholic schools because they didn't have any teachers who specialized in serving students with special needs or lacked the resources, these teachers appeared to be even more adamant in their commission to serve these children who were not welcomed elsewhere. This sentiment was detectable when Tara continued sharing her experience:

> So, we are not special education teachers. Yes, we are not, but it shouldn't stop us from trying to learn how to meet everyone's educational needs. And I mean it's crazy I am saying this now just because I remember the first few weeks when they told me, you know, that Myra was to be in my classroom. I have no idea about a child with Down syndrome. None whatsoever. I did all my own research. But all the techniques I used helped all my students. Crazy as it sounds, I so glad Myra was my student in my first year because it kind of molded me into the teacher I am now.

This welcoming response to a child with Down syndrome and adapting to the needs of the child was not limited to the novice teachers who were just embarking on their careers and were keen to take on this challenge. Lisa, a veteran teacher at St. Marian shared this about her first-time experience of serving a student with Down syndrome:

> I was really nervous because it was my first time. But I put it in God's hands, and I follow my heart and I think that's what helps me tremendously. And it's the support from the parents and the children. Them too. They are so patient. So patient with me.

This sense of nervousness and trepidation was a common emotional response from all the teachers, but they were also expeditious in noting the joy this endeavor brought to them. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, who had accepted to welcome a child with Down syndrome within a day of being informed disclosed:

> In the beginning I was like a little bit shocked and afraid. I didn't have much time. But you know it is normal to be afraid of something new. But it's okay. I feel like somebody had to start this [service to children with Down syndrome]. I was nervous but at the same time I feel like what if this is my child? She [student with Down syndrome] was a blessing and everyone started getting excited about it.

Although it was indisputable that the teachers had a key role to play in the welcoming of Down syndrome children at St. Marian none of the teachers take credit for the accolades. The spirit of care and sense of duty was repeatedly acknowledged by the principal, staff, and parents. "It is sister's [Sr. Teresa] dream but the work happens in the classroom. They [teachers at St. Marian] are doing the work." said Maria, a staff member at St. Marian. Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian, confirmed Maria's sentiment when she said:

> And I think it's just the openness of the teachers. I got no pushback from the teachers. None. And I talk to the teachers before bringing an extra body into their classroom. But they are so accepting. This one teacher even said, you know if that was my niece, I would want a school to accept her. That's how they all are. Very accepting.

Echoing what the teachers shared about their nervousness eventually resulting in an emotion of excitement, Sr. Teresa acknowledged an overall excitement in the faculty:

> It seems to me that that there is an excitement all around this now. They look for who is coming to them the following year. Will it be Xavier? Jackie? Arianna? Or any of the children. It is just so wonderful to see.

The teachers noted that their 1st-year experiences would not have resulted in the excitement they felt and the successes they experienced without the support of the parents of the children with Down syndrome. Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian, shared one such experience.

> I was not fearful but kind of like I was a little nervous just because I didn't know what to expect. And it was, it was new. It was my first-year teaching. But the parents helped. The mom worked with me. So, I think just that interaction, we had that constant dialogue. I think that was good. That was great.

Her colleague Tara had this to say:

> Even though at times I can get frustrated because it can be a lot of work, I am glad they [parents of children with Down syndrome] did not give up. I now see what I can do and their child can do. For that I will be ever grateful.

As she reminisced on her first-year experience while she was serving a student with Down syndrome for the first time, she added:

> It was kind of like, oh man, what am I getting myself into? I remember, at first, I want to say, the first month I cried all the way home. I was going home crying. How am I going to do this? I have, you know, I have so many students who need my help. And yet I have my little Myra. You know she was so lovable, so gentle and caring. And so, I just did it. She helped me do it. We both tried our best.

Support Provided by Parents

All the parents interviewed held the principal, teachers, and staff in very high regard when it came to providing a caring and loving environment for their children with Down syndrome. They believe that the environment provided at St. Marian unconditionally catered to the needs of their children and helped grow and actualize their dreams. The main thing here [at St. Marian] is the warmth that you feel. You see it everywhere" verbalized Jackie's mother. "If I had known this is what Catholic schools were like, I would have put all my kids through Catholic schools."

The teachers had repeatedly mentioned the unwavering support they received from the parents in working with the children with Down syndrome. In their interviews the parents emulated the same sentiment. "I feel so supported by everyone. I can ask any amount of questions at any time. There is just so much support," repeated Jackie's mother while sharing her experiences of the inclusive practices she witnessed at St. Marian.

> I just trust them. I would see it everywhere. How they would walk the children, how they would welcome them every morning, how they would teach them. Just so much love. They let them be themselves, but they also show them the way. You know I am very involved. I am there all the time, so I can really see how much they work and how much they care. Everybody.

The culture of care was the leading reason parents remained at St. Marian School. Xavier's parents who transferred all their children from public school to St. Marian overnight shared how firmly they believed in the culture and environment at St. Marian. "I think just the overall environment. I love it. I love the communication. I love how everybody at the school is

just, just loving and supportive." She continued to share her own observation of the inclusive practices that made the school environment an honest reflection of the school's mission. "You know, everybody knows his name and talk to him. Even the upper grade levels. Even the kids I don't know."

The teachers and parents of the children with Down syndrome shared a relationship that was based on trust and mutual understanding and was built on the foundation of the care they were providing the children. In conversations with the teachers parents had often time shared their gratitude and praise for what the teachers at St. Marian were doing for their children. Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian, mentioned one such conversation of the many she has had with the parents over the years:

> She [parent of a child with Down syndrome] just felt the love and they keep thanking me. But I tell them that I am learning from them. I think the love they see the moment that they step into our school. That's what it is. There is something about our school. I always hear that from the parents.

The teachers had communicated oftentimes the very important role the parents played in supporting the education of their children, both in the classroom and at home. Some of the support parents offered was by highlighting text for the children, color coding text, rewriting text in larger font for easy reading, modifying certain content etc. They noted how involved and present parents were to be available to support the children with Down syndrome in all the areas. But not all parents found themselves to be physically present their children's classroom, but this did not limit the success of the child or reduce the progress the child made as revealed by one of the parents:

> You know it is really hard for me as I work full time and I have other children. I can't be there all the time. But the teachers have been super supportive, and they give me the same love and support. The teachers give their 100%. They all go above and beyond. Its new for many of the teachers but they have managed and done a great job. I can't say enough. Everyone feels included. I just love that. They treat all the kids the same.

When asked about their own first-hand experiences of enrolling their children at St. Marian, the parents shared that their trepidation was similar to any other parent enrolling their child at a school for the first time. Jackie's mother affirmed this by saying, "I felt the same with all my children. You know all parents are nervous when they drop their children off anywhere." But they also shared how the principal, staff and teachers diminished those feelings of apprehensions by their acts and words of affirmation and consolation. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, confirmed this when she shared, "She [mother of a child with Down syndrome] would say she is afraid and I would just say, she is in good hands. She is going to be fine." Claire, another teacher at St. Marian, also spoke to this theme:

> I talk to the parents all year. And they always thank me for being patient with their daughter. But sometime the mother would stand by the door and even make gestures to her child and I would have to send her away. I had to say, you are stressing her out. Trust me. Sometimes you just have to help them believe the children are okay.

Developing a Common Ground for Collaboration That Benefits All Students

Research has highlighted the central role of teaching practice in ensuring that inclusive classrooms provide benefits for all students (Sharma et al., 2008). Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion are more likely to adapt the way they work to benefit all of their

students (Sharma et al., 2008). Research also suggests that it is through the development of this culture of collaborative problem solving that the inclusion of students with disabilities can serve as a catalyst for school-wide improvement and yield benefits for non-disabled students (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). In effective inclusive schools, such as St. Marian, the traditional isolated classroom is replaced with more a flexible structure that facilitates collaboration across school staff. This culture permits educators to develop coordinated approaches focused on addressing the specific needs of individual students. The skills these educators develop to support students with disabilities help them to better address the unique needs of all of their students.

The sub-construct of embracing students with down syndrome as a devotion to caring for all students arose in over 45 excerpts in the interviews with the principal, staff, teachers, and parents. The participants attested to how students with Down syndrome thrive in a general education classroom and how the benefits of that inclusion are felt by all students beyond the classroom. The sub constructs of this theme included the qualities of students with Down syndrome, the response of non-disabled peers to their classmates and schoolmates with Down syndrome, and the response from other members of the community including parents of students without disabilities.

Children with Down syndrome are capable learners who are excited and eager to learn. This was the common and unanimous response from the participants at St. Marian school. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian who was involved in teaching children with Down syndrome in their early childhood years, said:

> They just need to be given the opportunity to excel. They may learn at a slower pace but are more than capable of learning. They are strong visual learners. This means that they understand what they see better than what they hear.

The teachers attributed the kind and loving personalities of the children themselves to their keen love for learning. The parents also spoke of the children's good social skills, which are often utilized to increase learning and teaching opportunities. The significance of discussing the qualities of children with Down syndrome was to help remove some of the misconceptions that surround people's beliefs regarding the behaviors and abilities of children with Down syndrome which ultimately results in denying them a place in a general education classroom. Anita, a teacher at St. Marian described all her students with Down syndrome with an ardent sense of affection and adulation. "She is just a blessing." she said about Myra, a student with Down syndrome at St. Marian. "She is such a good girl. Really, a model for all the other students. She has such a loving and caring personality. She just made teaching so easy for me."

"You know they are not that different from the other children. Yes, they may look different, but it's like teaching everybody else," said Tara, a teacher at St. Marian School, who had the opportunity to serve children with Down syndrome in her first year of teaching. She went on to share the following excerpts about Xavier, a student with Down syndrome at St. Marian who was loved by the entire community:

> When we would go to mass, Xavier would just be so focused. He was always super respectful and reverent. I never had to tell him, like, to be quiet, or like, don't play. Because you know, he is a very talkative and playful child. But he just knows what we expect of him, especially in church. And now he is also an alter server. and I remember

the day he was receiving his First Communion. He was like, “finally I was just so happy.”

All the teachers spoke of Xavier’s love for God and how he inspired his peers to participate in mass and other church activities. “He just loves to sing in church. Even if he gets the words wrong, he doesn’t care, he just sings. He is just so passionate about singing in church. He is all about God,” added Tara.

The parents of the children shared their stories of their children since birth and their conversations reflected the love these children brought into their lives. “He changed our lives forever.” said Xavier’s mother. “I wasn’t aware before his birth that he had Down syndrome. It was new for us, but we all grew together as a family.” Xavier’s mother disclosed the serious medical challenges Xavier faced in his early infancy and how he fought against those challenges with the greatest resilience and courage. “We did have a tough journey since his birth but he was always a happy child.” She went on to share one of Xavier’s most outstanding features that everyone in the community also attested to:

> Xavier is something else. If you meet this guy you will just fall in love with him. You know he calls all the teachers at the school his girlfriends. I tell him not to but that’s just him. He also loves all his friends. Jackie and he are totally inseparable. Sometimes, he will blush when I speak of her. It is just that they are all so loving. And you know, I have other children, but I don’t treat him differently from them. If he gets into trouble, he knows there will be consequences. But he is very helpful. He does all his chores. He watches his older siblings and learns from them. Like, it is his job to take out the trash and he always takes that so seriously. Having Xavier in our lives has just changed our

whole lives around. We are a whole different family because of him. I now know what really matters. I cannot imagine my life without all the love Xavier brought to it.

Arianna's parents also narrated their story of Arianna's birth and journey thereon recounting the numerous severe health challenges. Arianna's challenges included a fight against pediatric cancer. Their recapitulation of their stories was seeped in a deep admiration for Arianna's fighting spirit. "She used to be in a lot of pain through all her treatments, but she never stopped smiling." said Arianna's father. He also added that Arianna struggled with speech and hardly verbalized her thoughts until she started to attend St. Marian. Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian and Maria a staff member there also attested to this fact and added this incredibly heartwarming account that took place with Arianna and her mother.

Arianna has been through a lot in her life so far. She came to us in a stroller with her mom at a very early age and she didn't speak much. Her mom had to do a lot of her and that was understandably concerning to us. The mom was with her in the classroom helping her and we saw a lot of progress. She wasn't in her stroller anymore and she was learning and making friends. Even if she couldn't read like the other kids, she wanted the books like them and the teacher would give them to her. But what was most incredible to us was when she was in here and called out to her mom for the first time ever. Right here in this office. She had never said the word mom before. We all just cried. Most of all mom. I am not a mother, but I can just imagine what that must have felt like for her mother.

Arianna's mother described this incident with the outmost admiration for the community at St. Marian who she believes made everything possible for Arianna. Despite her limited capacity to verbalize her thoughts Arianna's mother shared an endearing quirk of Arianna's that

she believed at other schools may not have been so welcoming. “She would pull other children’s ears.” Arianna’s mother laughed as she shared these details:

> Yes. She loved grabbing other children’ ears. Not to hurt them. That’s just how she showed her love. And the kids did not mind it at all. They would just tell her to stop or gently put her hand down. But she would do it again and they would all laugh. I know at some other school I would have been called by the principal or they would have given Arianna a warning but here they just taught her to stop if it was not welcome or they thought it would hurt someone. And she learned. And that is it. They all learn.

The parents and teachers shared how Arianna is now a thriving young child who may not be performing at her grade level or mastering all the standards required but she is progressing and is committed to doing her best. Even in the distance learning situation schools found themselves in during the COVID-19 pandemic, when this study was undertaken, Arianna’s teachers found it essential to note that Arianna was still keen to learn and was present and participative in all her classes. “Her hard work is truly a testimony to her own tenacity,” her teacher at St. Marian said proudly.

Anita, a teacher at St. Marian who had taught at least three children with Down syndrome recalls having two students with Down syndrome in her classroom the previous school year and shared how their presence transformed the energy of the entire class.

> In all my years of teaching, last year when I had two students with Down syndrome, my students were the most compassionate students I have ever taught. And I say that to everyone, we talk about that amongst ourselves all the time. Last year’s class got along so well. You know kids in this grade level are known for tattling and not getting along. This is usually that age. But

not that class. Everyone played together. They all cared for each other. They even looked for Jackie and Xavier to include them in their games.

All the teachers and the principal provided multiple examples of how the culture of caring at St. Marian's was invigorated by embracing full inclusion and expressly the inclusion of children with Down syndrome. "It is different when you have a class that has a student with Down syndrome. It's such a contrast. In a good way," attested Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian. The response from the teachers was resounding as to how the effect on the peers of students with Down syndrome was beyond what could be taught in a classroom. They all framed a picture of what St. Marian looks like on a regular day with all the children displaying the deepest levels of compassion and care to their vulnerable counterparts. Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian, reiterated, "The other children have learned to be so humble and patient. They know that Xavier may take some extra time, but they just wait patiently. It's just so beautiful. You can't teach that kind of love." The teachers recognized that there was stark difference between classes they taught that did not have students with Down syndrome. "They just transform the classroom. Make us all so close and caring toward each other," added Tara a teacher who believed her mission to serve all children was reaching its fruition at St. Marian. Her colleague, Claire, substantiated this conviction by adding:

> God knows what our school would be like without these kids. We mainstream these children because that's what they need. Why not? It's better for all the kids. It benefits all the kids. It's so beautiful to seem them all take care of each other. When they play or need to get in line, they will grab their little hands and say, no, no, this way. Just melts my heart. The gentleness they show each other.

The conversation on how all students benefited from full-inclusion also included what steps the teachers took to prepare the other students and community to welcome the students with Down syndrome. The teachers recognized that educating the children about the children with Down syndrome and assisting children with identifying that children with Down syndrome were distinctive but not different was vital in creating a welcoming environment at St. Marian. The principal, staff and teachers concurred that the parents had a significant role in procuring and administering some of the resources to the children and community. The participants mentioned certain school-wide events that celebrated their diversity. One specific celebration that was mentioned by all the teachers and parents was *Rock Your Socks* day that is celebrated annually on March 21 which is also recognized worldwide as World Down Syndrome Day. The school sets this day aside to raise awareness and educate the community about Down syndrome and be part of the global voice for advocating for the rights, inclusion, and wellbeing of people with Down syndrome. This annual celebration even took place when the students were off campus engaged in distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, proudly declared, "It didn't keep us from doing what we always do. The children were still so excited to be part of this celebration. They said they did it for their friends." Anita, also a teacher at St. Marian ratified how educating in a Catholic school environment was foundational in their goal to educate all the children in becoming welcoming and responsive peers to the children with Down syndrome. She said:

> *Rock Your Socks* day helps us all remember that we have friends in our school that we love. But we do try our best to educate the children about their friends in our classroom too. I read and try to find things like how to help students understand their friends who

may seem different from them. In our grade, our religion text talks about, you know, how we are all special. We learn about how we are all unique and God made us all different, but we all need to love one another, no matter who or what we are.

Anita's colleague of many years, Tara, also parroted a congruous thought. She said:

The good thing is that we are in a Catholic school, so we can bring up in God in everything we teach. Like I use stories from the bible, and I tell the kids that Jesus embraced everybody even with their differences. Jesus didn't turn anyone away. And so, I would say, you know, she [Jackie] learns differently and I won't turn away from her and you shouldn't either. They are not so different from us. They are more similar than different.

While discussing how the teachers would educate the students about inclusion in the classroom and noting the benefits all students were receiving from full inclusion at St. Marian, the teachers and principal were also asked about any pushback received from parents of non-disabled children or from children who may find the accommodation made for their Down syndrome peers as unfair. Except for one case of a parent withdrawing their child from St. Marian due to the increasing enrollment of special needs students at St. Marian, the teachers and principal maintained that there was an overwhelming support from the community in favor of welcoming all students to St. Marian. "You know we would think some parents would worry that their child wouldn't get the same attention, but nobody ever said that to me. They were all just very supportive," disclosed Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian who was one of the early childhood teachers to the children with Down syndrome. Maria, staff member at St. Marian who was intrinsically involved with parent relations at St. Marian, said:

> All our parents are very supportive, you know. I think it is also that the children go home and tell the parents that they are all treated the same and they themselves educate their parents. So that makes a big difference.

Rachel, an early childhood teacher at St. Marian shared how it could have been a challenge to allow the children with Down syndrome additional time on the rug doing puzzles to build their motor skills while the other children would complete their assignments at their desks, if the children were not educated about the needs of children with Down syndrome and how those were different from theirs. This is how Rachel explained it to her students noting that it is important to explain the rationale to the children and be honest with them:

> You know everyone will get what they need. Like when you are thirsty, only you get a drink of water not the whole class. The same way when your friends [peers with Down syndrome] need certain things they need to get that. When you will need something then you will get it too. We all need something special for us at different times.

Providing Inclusive Supports and Opportunities

A purpose of this study was to learn how teachers, administration and staff of an elementary school create an environment of inclusion with the hope to inspire other Catholic elementary schools to adopt similar practices. In order to investigate what these policies and practices looked like at St. Marian the teachers were asked about their reality with resources available to them, professional development and any additional supports that were offered to them as teachers. It is crucial to note here that the teachers did not name a lack of resources or professional development as a challenge in their service to children with Down syndrome. They

It was evident from the conversation on this issue with Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian, that the school did not create policies that in turn generated hurdles for parents. Administrative polices did not transfer the financial burden of serving the children with Down syndrome on to the parents by charging them the cost of an aide for the student. Sr. Teresa voiced, "It would be easy to just charge the parents. But I know they cannot afford it. And how is that fair? It's a matter of justice you know. A matter of fairness."

"I had a made a commitment to their parents. I would let nothing happen to these kids. To any of my kids. Not on my watch." To this end, Rachel a teacher at St. Marian, retold an instance where she realized early how Jackie, a student with Down syndrome, was very quiet and could possibly leave the classroom unnoticed. To ensure that did not happen, Rachel installed a bell on her classroom door so she would be aware if any of the children entered or left the room.

On the conversation of resources and their availability to the teachers to better help them serve the children, Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian said:

> We create the resources. I know I was going to have Myra the following year. I prepared myself. I did it myself, you know, looking at what kind of things I can do. Commensuration with other teachers who had already had Myra. And I love learning and doing the research. So, I did.

It was evident from the interviews that all the teachers shared a distinct characteristic that imbued a deep love for teaching and an even greater love for learning. "I love teaching and the incredible joy it brings to me" joyfully exclaimed Claire, a teacher at St. Marian. And she goes on to explain how she also involves the parents in her learning because the partnership between the teachers and the parents and in serving children with Down syndrome is key. I tell them, "I

am going to be learning from you, so please be patient with me. I am going to do my best to help her."

As the conversation about resources continued, Tara, a teacher at St. Marian made a notable point about serving children with Down syndrome. "We don't see them as different from us or any other kids. Yes, they learn differently, so we teach differently." This very matter of fact made statement is the how each teacher at St. Marian views their duty toward including all children. They do not, under any circumstances, view the children with Down syndrome as different but they do recognize as children who learn differently. And this logic was analogous to expectation of learners in the general education classroom. Tara went on to say:

> We are a very close family. And yes, we may not have all the resources for the kids with learning disabilities, but we are going to try our best with whatever they might need. But you know what we do have? We have all the love and attention they need. And not just for the kids but for the parents too.

Liaison With External Organizations

A prevailing theme among teachers reference to any perceptible lack of resources was their interdependence as a team and their astounding call to mission. "This is a very nurturing group of people," said Anita, a teacher at St. Marian, who shared multiple personal experiences of working with the teachers, staff, and principal at St. Marian. Each experience told a story of how they all collectively worked for the betterment of all the children. "We are an awesome group of teachers. We work together. We know what we want for our children," confidently stated Lisa, a teacher who had now served at least two children with Down syndrome. She

affirmed the notion that all the teachers worked as a team at St. Marian and the foundation of that work was the love for what they do:

> I will go to the ends of the earth to find ways to help them. But I just think they just feel the love we have for them. We are here with open arms for them. And yes, we have a lot to learn but we will do it together as a team.

A common response that arose from the participants when discussing what resources were available to them in in their vocation as the principal, teachers, and parents, all the participants resoundingly name Club 21 a private non-profit organization that supported children, parents and communities serving students with Down syndrome. This no-cost resource has been key in supporting the principal and teachers with professional development specific to teaching children with Down syndrome and also offers networking opportunities with other schools and teachers who are serving the same demographic. This organization has been mentioned by all the parents as their social and practical support in helping them as parents of children with Down syndrome. In Arianna's and Jackie's parents' case, they learned of St. Marian by meeting other parents at Club 21.

"Club 21 is a Godsend. They just give us so much help and Sr. Teresa makes sure we get all that help," said Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, who had limited time to prepare and welcome Jackie into her classroom but found that the resources and training from Club 21 was key in her preparation and professional development. "All the teachers are enrolled with Club 21," disclosed Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian. "We were even planning training just for our school teachers and staff but COVID-19 happened and we had to delay the plans." Sr. Teresa also

mentioned how she is in constant pursuit to find additional resources and funding to support the teachers:

> You know I don't always go looking for the funds or grants. They just come to me. Like I've used Title 1 funding and receive a lot of resources from there. Just recently I received some grant money that was specifically for a school serving children with disabilities. It's just amazing how people bless us for the work we do.

Making Minor Accommodations and Adjustments by Employing the STEP Program and UDL

When teachers discussed how they adapted to teaching children with Down syndrome, they listed some specific practices they adopted at St. Marian. These included accommodations made for the students with the purpose and objective to help the children feel included and learn. "You create the resources. You make it happen. We did," proudly stated Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian. "Like Xavier uses a calculator for Math and that's okay. He knows how to do the work he just needs some help doing it." Most of the students with Down syndrome have been enrolled at St. Marian from the age of 5 and 6 and the teachers provided the support these students needed at an early age. "They struggle with fine motor skills, so I give more puzzles and alphabets to trace," continues Lisa. "Sr. Teresa helped us get manipulative, things to trace, anything to help them strengthen their motor skills. To develop how they hold and grasp the pencil." It was evident that the teachers paid attention to the specific needs of the children with Down syndrome and found the resources that helped the students. Claire, a teacher at St. Marian, said:

> We accommodate the students. They may be learning to add while the rest of the children are multiplying. We help them go at their pace. It might be slower than others,

but they are learning. We use visuals, songs, and manipulative. I use a lot of puzzles. Everything helps and it helps all the students.

The teachers also divulged that parent support was key in the accommodations they were making in the classroom, but they mostly credited Sr. Teresa, principal of St. Marian, for the encouragement and endorsement they received to be effective teachers who were trusted to explore and pursue different techniques and strategies with their students. They believed this autonomy they had while receiving foundational and formal supports via professional development at Club 21 was imperative in their success as teachers. Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, said, "We are so blessed to have a principal who gives us the freedom to work in our classrooms the way it's a best fit for everyone." Although these efforts take additional time and effort on the part of the teachers, the teachers still considered themselves blessed to be part of the learning for these children with Down syndrome. They did not sense that they were lacking or inadequate in resources in anyway. Tara, a teacher at St. Marian, went as far to say that they were better off than many of the teachers she has interacted with at other Catholic schools. "I think we are spoiled. Sr. Teresa spoils us. She not only fulfills the children's needs but she will get us whatever we need. If we need iPads, she will find them for us."

The fervent discussion on accommodations led to a conversation on what the principal, teachers and parents thought about the mastery of skills and standards by the children with Down syndrome and if the notion of excessive accommodations and modifications would question if the children with Down syndrome were achieving the academic standards expected of them. As a seasoned administrator, Sr. Teresa acknowledged how other school administrators and teachers may frown upon the practice of accommodations and the possible paucity of grade level

academic standards. She spoke with a deep understanding of this challenge while being courageous enough to challenge the status quo of academic expectations that have been placed upon children today. She very resolutely stated:

> You know that is not what is important here. Our mission statement doesn't say anything about grades or scores. It speaks to the potential of the child. Sometime even the parents [of children with Down syndrome] worry if their child will keep up with the work or graduate. And I say to them, they will graduate. That is part of our mission to make them the best person God meant them to be. And yes, at times I find myself worrying about when they move to junior high or have multiple teachers, and then I remind myself, God will make it work. He always does. I go back to my conversations with God.

The teachers also believed that even though they designed accommodations for the children with Down syndrome they still held them to high expectations. Maria, staff member at St. Marian, was proud to convey this:

> We do not baby them. We always treat them the same. Yes, the teachers may teach them differently and their parents do support them, but when there are consequences for behavior, we treat them like the other children. But I think that is why they thrive. They know we care for them; they know they are special to us but we don't treat them any differently.

Measuring Success Beyond the Mastery of Academic Standards and Benchmarks

The teachers in their interviews recognized that children with Down syndrome may struggle with their learning, and with keeping pace in the classroom but them also concurrently and repeatedly remarked on how they achieve outstanding progress and growth. They also

confirmed in some cases how students with Down syndrome surpassed their general education classmates in academic performance. Claire, a teacher at St. Marian, said:

> Myra used to struggle with her spelling words. So, I used to provide them to her ahead of time and mom worked very hard with her. And you know, she does better than most students in my classroom. I think it is just assumed that these students will not do well. But they will. We just have to give them a chance.

Claire often remarked on how Myra, a student with Down syndrome performed in the classroom, followed directions without any additional supports and most importantly was gentle, kind-hearted and much loved by her peers.

On further inquiry the parents of children with Down syndrome did not sound alarmed or concerned about their children with Down syndrome not meeting the academic standards of their respective grade levels. Arianna's parents spoke with much gratitude for what the teachers and principal have done for their child and how providing a welcome environment for their child was beyond what they could expect.

> She [Arianna] may not achieve the same results as the other kids. But that is okay. She is different from them. But that does not mean she is not learning. She has learned a lot and for that we are grateful.

Jackie's mother also focused on the fact that her child is progressing. "The progress is what matters to me. She is doing better each day and that's what matters."

The teachers often recalled their mission and how they were working together as team to achieve it. They spoke often of how this is not a vocation you can restrict with a list of skills and standards. They implied that the successes were visible in ways beyond grades and scores and

society just needs to find ways to see it. Rachel, a teacher at St. Marian, held back tears when she articulated this:

> We know they might all be at grade level, but we focus on what they are learning. Beyond the academics. We were all there when Xavier received his First Communion. We were in tears seeing him in his suit walking down the aisle. We hear him sing in church or when he alters serves. And we cannot wait to see them graduate. All of this makes us so proud.

Discussion of Research Question 1

Three main themes emerged from the data. The first theme spoke to how the entire school community developed a shared framework that focused on a shared mission. The second theme showed how St. Marian school served its students with Down syndrome by instituting a culture of collaboration amongst all its shareholders and how this was founded on a common ground for collaboration. Finally, the third theme arose from the data that related to how St. Marian provided supports and opportunities to its students with Down syndrome that are inclusive in nature. This includes practices that help create and sustain an ethic of caring at St. Marian School.

Firstly, the findings from the data align with mission and vision of Catholic schools. Canon 794 §1 stated that "The duty and right of educating belongs in a special way to the Church, to which has been divinely entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach the fullness of the Christian life" (Vatican, n.d.). The main elements of Catholic education include the capability of Catholic schools to accommodate educational change, adapting to new pedagogical styles, a focus to infuse the Gospel message in all settings, and

openness to culture and to a plurality of perspectives (Martin & Litton, 2004). The community of St. Marian elementary school has heeded its call to mission, as the principal, staff, teachers, and parents have created an environment that serves the most vulnerable in society and have strived to make inclusion normal and ordinary.

It is evident through the findings that the mission of Catholic schools and the mission of St. Marian School were the foundation and guide to all the work attained as a unified community. The participants were acutely aware of this mission and referred to it often when asked why they chose St. Marian School to live their own vocations. As stated, multiple times by various participants the mission statement was a living document that the staff, teachers, and principal embodied in their daily interaction with the community at St. Marian. “When persons with disabilities are excluded from catechetical and academic programs, a piece of the Body of Christ is missing” (NCPD, 2010, para. 6). The findings from the data highlight the shared framework and moral imperative the community of St. Marian developed to sustain an educational program for students with Down syndrome.

Secondly, the findings from the data also aligned with the Catholic Social Teachings of the Catholic Church. Catholic Social Teaching, an integral part of Catholic education (Bryk et al., 1993), is a doctrine developed by the Catholic Church regarding social justice, social organization, and the state’s responsibility to take care of its people. Scanlan (2009a) identified CST as the foundation for the implementation of inclusive teaching practices in schools. It was evident from the data explication that the community of St. Marian community made an ardent effort to ensure that children with Down syndrome are welcomed as full participants and

experience a true belonging in Catholic schools. The school community was focused on the tenets of CST that include human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity.

On further investigating the process by which St. Marian serves students with Down syndrome it was evident that entire community focused on creating a common ground for collaboration and instituted this culture of collaboration amongst the teachers, staff, principal, and parents. The community of St. Marian has been recognized as the epitome of love and care by all the participants through their own personal experiences and stories. The principal, staff and teachers shifted from "something must be done" to the "I must do something" school of thought and therefore became agents of change. In alignment with Noddings (2016), the entire community responded to the initial impulse to care with an act of commitment. They were committed to serve all the children of God, whoever chose to enter their gates and face the challenges that it presented. The effectiveness in serving the children with Down syndrome, and the reason why parents chose and remained at St. Marian was attributed to the culture and environment of care that was palpable at the school.

Discussion of Research Question 2

The second research question sought to identify the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school. The question on challenges of providing an education to children with Down syndrome was posed to the staff, teachers, parents, and principal. There were 16 related excerpts to this theme with sub constructs related to limited financial resources, continued professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, advocacy, and continuing care for students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools.

Limited Financial Resources

The lack of the technical skills or the capacity to implement inclusive practices is the logic that dictates the initial response of many Catholic schools, which typically claim they would be "happy to accept" a student with disabilities, but that the "needs are too costly for the school to provide" and that the lack of federal and state aid is the barrier. Preimesberger (2000) describes Catholic schools as hindered from providing the same services of public schools "because of lack of funds, resources, and trained professionals in the area of special education" (p. 128).

Based on interviews with the teachers, staff and principal at St. Marian, the logic that dictates other schools does not seem pertinent. "A lack of resources and finances do not hinder the services St. Marian provides its students with Down syndrome," asserted Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian. Designedly, the principal of a Catholic school is responsible and accountable to ensure the viability and sustenance of the school's program, and Sr. Teresa acknowledges this encumbrance without naming it as a significant imposition or challenge. "I know schools think they don't have the finances to serve children with special needs. But it does not take a lot. God finds a way," said Sr. Teresa after being often times asked if finances pose any challenges in the extension of her school's educational program to children with Down syndrome. Sr. Teresa has also been credited with seeking various avenues to support the inclusion program at St. Marian through grants and government funding. Sr. Teresa, in turn, credits these financial supports to generous donors and supporters of Catholic education. Even though she single-handedly takes on the charge of ensuring a financially sound plan of supporting the school program she plaudits all the work and the success of the program to her

team consisting of her staff, teachers, and school parents. In doing so, she lists the challenges parents face as a far greater burden than the school does in providing services to the children with Down syndrome.

> Not all the parents can access the additional resources out there for them. Especially those from the government and the state. Many of them do not even qualify for the help and that to me is unfair. If they cannot be around to help their child, then it is their loss. It's a great challenge for middle class families. They cannot always have access to therapists, counselors, tutors, or professional support. I don't know what it must be like to be in their shoes, so we have to provide them the comfort we can. We have to provide them that space, said Sr. Teresa.

All the teachers at St. Marian, except one grade level, disclosed that they did not have instructional and teacher aides assisting them in the classroom. On being asked if this was a challenge for them none of them believed that it was. Anita, a teacher at St. Marian, who had a class size of 20 to 25 students that included two children with Down syndrome in her classroom expressed the following:

> I don't have an aide and I don't think I need one. The parents help me a lot and I divide my time well amongst all the children. But you know if I did Sr. Teresa would get me one. I just don't think I need one yet. Claire, a colleague of Anita's also remarked similarly saying, "I have about 25 to 28 students and I don't have an aide, and that is fine. I pretty much prep [prepare] everything I need. I also use my time at home. But it's fine. I get things done." She went on to say:

> I usually do my own research and find new ways to help the kids. But we have to do that for all the children. Look at us now. We are looking at websites to see how we can teach all the children on Zoom. How do we keep them engaged? So, we are always learning. Not just for these kids but for all the kids.

The parents of children with Down syndrome were asked about their thoughts on the fact that the teachers did not have any additional assistance in the classroom through aides or paraprofessionals. This is what Jackie's mother said:

> My daughter used to have two aides in the public school she attended. One on each side and learned nothing. She couldn't do anything for herself. Everywhere she looked there was an adult. Even to go to the bathroom. I don't want that for her. Here [St. Marian School] she is taught how to help herself. She is exposed to real life. They trust she can do it and she does. They treat them all the same. If the teachers need any help, I would help them.

The teachers acknowledged that when Arianna, a student with Down syndrome arrived at St. Marian her mother's presence in the classroom was crucial. Arianna needed the help in using the bathroom and in some cases in the classroom. "We couldn't afford an aide and we were honest with mom [Arianna's mother]. But when she said she could be present in the classroom we were all for it."

As mentioned previously, Xavier's parents work full time and could not always be physically present to assist the teacher or Xavier in the classroom. In light of this acknowledgment Xavier's mother maintained, "I know they don't all have aides and I know I can't always be there. But they are still doing a fantastic job. I have no complaints at all."

Continued Professional Development Opportunities

The mission of St. Marian School was at the forefront when the teachers adduced their narrations of success and struggle while living out their vocation as Catholic school teachers. When asked what they considered challenging in their pursuit of this mission, specifically affiliated to serving children with Down syndrome, there was a marked level of introspect rather than an attack on the circumstances placed before them. Their responses defied the expectations as laid out by the research conducted in this area. They expressed a deeper sense of gratification from the work and suggested that the challenges faced could be removed through an increased effort on their own part as teachers rather than the responsibility of anyone else. When asked what supports would assist them in improving their service delivery to students with Down syndrome the teachers communicated the following needs: An increased time to plan curriculum and prepare accordingly, the continued support of parents, and the possible hiring of part time instructional aides to support the differentiated instruction in the classroom. While sharing these needs they were confident that if they ever had any needs or found grounds strong enough to ask for any additional supports that their principal, Sr. Teresa, would find all means to materialize these supports. They expressed that they just didn't find the needs pressing enough to pursue them and that they feel an immense sense of support from the principal, staff, parents and community at St. Marian. "If I asked for anything," said Anita, a teacher at St. Marian, "it would be more time. I don't know how you would get more of that but time just to plan things better and put things together. Especially for the kids whose parents cannot help that much."

It was established through the interviews that the teachers were receiving professional development in the area of serving students with Down syndrome through Club 21, a private

non-profit that was created to support teachers and parents of children with Down syndrome. Along with this the teachers admitted how they themselves researched and modified the curriculum. Anita continued,

> Sometimes I struggle with how to modify the assignments for them [students with Down syndrome]. Like, if we are doing reports and presentations, some of them are not ready or comfortable to do them yet. But the parents really encourage us to keep our expectations high and we have their support. At the end of the day, they [the children with Down syndrome] just do it. They really can.

Parents and teachers likewise disclosed how other Catholic schools who had denied services to children with Down syndrome often ascribed the denial to the lack of one-on-one supports in the classroom via instructional aides. All but one teacher at St. Marian had an instructional aide in the classroom. The teachers without instructional aides did not find the lack of this additional support to affect the subsistence of their service delivery to students with Down syndrome. They predicted that the availability of the parents both in the classroom and beyond was key in fulfilling the specific needs of students with Down syndrome especially those whose needs necessitated physical assistance in accessing materials in the classroom, maneuvering the play equipment or assistance in utilizing the facilities. Anita, a teacher at St. Marian who had received such support of a parent in the classroom said:

> Having her [student with Down syndrome] mom here made a huge difference. The mother would leave and come back, but I knew I had her help. But that was something with a childlike Arianna, you know. She needed that help because when she came to us, she was still in diapers and wasn't speaking a lot. That additional person helped. I don't

think I could have done it without mom. But for the others I didn't need that. And I know if I told Sr. Teresa that I needed an aide she would get me one next morning. I just don't think I need it yet.

Along with her colleagues, Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian also attested to the fact that the support from parents was key in allowing the teachers the freedom to employ multiple methodologies to teach the children with Down syndrome while gaining the assurance and affirmation from the parents. She recalled the following when she shared how the school had to let go of one child with disabilities who was found to be violent in the classroom and the school was unable to support the needs of the students, because the parents did not agree or support the teachers or the principal in their efforts to help the child. Amaya said:

> I think the challenges arise when parents are not on board or do not support us. And that counts for all the children not just children with Down syndrome. We did have one student we special need who we had to let go off because the parents were not on the same page as us. And that doesn't work. We cannot do anything if they don't have the same expectations from the kids themselves. And we had tried. The student was here with us for at least 6 months. Everybody was patient with her even though she would get violent and throw things in class. But we can't help them if the parents can't help them first. It was sad as we all took it very hard but that is what I mean when I say parents really need to be on board.

As mentioned earlier, principals play an indispensable role when it comes to ensuring the operational vitality of the school's educational program and the supports needed to ensure its success and vigor. It was evident through the interviews that the teachers struggled to list any

challenges that were specific to serving children with Down syndrome and found that the challenges they did face were generic and applicable to successfully serving all their students. They also believed that the community and the principal were doing everything in their power to make their roles as teachers increasingly effective and less burdensome. In response to the question of challenges Sr. Teresa concluded the discussion on the topic with the following words. “I didn’t come with all the answers and neither did the parents. We just have to grow and learn together.”

It could be concluded from the interviews that the teachers did not find that they were limited in resources, professional development, or formal training. On being asked if they there were areas that could be improved to assist in their efficacy as teachers of children of Down syndrome, 90% of the teachers believed that they could always benefit from additional professional development and suggested that this training could come from the archdiocese. Anita, a teacher at St. Marian went on to say, “The training needs to come from where we get all our other trainings. This would start a conversation with other teachers at other schools and then we can all benefit from the training.” It was disclosed through the interviews that the Department of Catholic Schools did not provide any targeted training to assist students with special needs. The trainings were designed for administrators and educating them on the legal formalities of serving students with disabilities. “The archdiocese helps us a lot. I only have good things to say. But these trainings, you know what I am talking about, it how to save ourselves. Not how to welcome these students,” evinced Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian who attended the annual mandatory trainings organized by the legal department at the archdiocese.

On discussing the issues raised above with the representative at the archdiocese, there was an acknowledgement of the frustration experienced by Sr. Teresa and other principals who shared similar sentiments. In further discussion it was evident that there is a focused approach on supporting schools with the assistance they need on creating fully inclusive environment at their schools. “We just reestablished an Inclusion Committee that has recruited members from both elementary and high schools and people who have done great work in the area of inclusion.” Allison, representative from the archdiocese, went on to explain how there is a pivotal movement at the DCS level in recognizing the importance of serving the special needs population and the how the pandemic catapulted the central leadership into the reimaging how we serve the most vulnerable amongst us. “It is sad that it came to this for us to realize that we are not doing enough. We are not doing this so we can attain funds; we need to do this because it’s the right thing to do.” Allison arrived at the DCS in a leadership position after spending a career in education and serving special needs students as a teacher and a principal. “I am extremely passionate about this work and I owe it to my parents to do this right.” As an aunt to a child with special needs, Allison herself has experienced a fair share of prejudice against her nephew, a child with special needs and his family.

Facing the Challenges at St. Marian

When recalling their experiences at seeking enrollment at other Catholic schools for their children with Down syndrome, the parents revealed how schools often cited a lack of resources and teacher training in special education as the main reasons for not accepting these exceptional children. The teachers were prompted in the interviews to respond to this position held by other Catholic schools and their own rumination on the issue of formalized training in special

education. And to this the teachers acknowledged the benefits of being trained formally in the area of special education, but they also noted that the lack of such training should not refrain them from serving students with Down syndrome. Claire, a teacher at St. Marian, responded to this construct with the following statement:

> We all have master's degrees in education, and I don't believe that you always need a special education degree to help these children. Maybe if these children were severely disabled then maybe, yes. But they are not. We can help them like everyone else. We just make a few accommodations and teach with more visuals or sometime maybe at a slower pace. But it can be done. It really can.

Amaya, a teacher at St. Marian, also acknowledged how her master's degree included a single unit in special education but she could always reach out to her professor for techniques, in-class observations, and continued support past her graduating from the university she earned her degree at. Tara, one of Amaya's colleagues reiterated the same by saying, "The techniques I adopted really helped all my students. I am glad I had these students [students with Down syndrome] early in my career because I was not yet set in my ways. I adapted."

Advocacy and the Continuation of Care in Catholic Schools

Although the parents who were interviewed were firm in their choice of Catholic education, their journey to arrive at St. Marian School was not easy or painless. Jackie, a student with Down syndrome lived in a city over 60 miles from St. Marian School. They had knocked on other Catholic school doors before arriving at St. Marian. There are 36 Catholic schools on the freeway corridor between the family's city of residence and St. Marian, none of which accepted Jackie into their programs. "Many said no even before meeting us," said Jackie's mother. "Some

said we don't have the resources to support your child and some told us their faculty and staffs were not trained to teach children with Down syndrome." Jackie's family moved closer to St. Marian's but is still unable to enroll Jackie in the parish school the family attends each Sunday. Jackie's mother recalled one especially uncomfortable interaction she had at one Catholic school.

> At one Catholic school I was told that I would have to shadow her (Jackie). I could not believe it. I did not like that word at all. Many didn't open the door for us or even try to help us. It was always, "we can't do this and that." They didn't deny that they were not capable, but they also did not try. So, when we heard of St. Marian through the National Catholic Board of Full Inclusion I was so excited to know my child could go to a Catholic school and be accepted.

Jackie's parents were introduced to Sr. Teresa at St. Marian through the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion. This board was created by volunteers to support parents and schools that wanted to create and maintain a fully inclusive program. The board also introduced Jackie's family to *Club 21,* a private group financed by philanthropists who provide important resources to parents of children with Down syndrome. This support is also extended to school faculties and staff via professional development at no financial burden to the schools or families of children with Down syndrome. It was at a Club 21 event where Jackie's parents then shared their news of finding a local Catholic school with Arianna's family who were themselves experiencing challenges in finding a Catholic school that would accept Arianna. "We were so happy to hear about St. Marian from Jackie's family," gratefully expressed Arianna's father. "We went to at least five Catholic schools and everyone said, 'no, we can't take her.' We had given up." The realization of the actuality that Catholic schools were not universally expected to

accept children with Down syndrome was unsettling for the teachers at St. Marian too. Tara, a teacher at St. Marian who served two students with Down syndrome since her arrival at St. Marian verbalized her interaction with other Catholic school teachers at a DCS sponsored professional development:

> I always thought all Catholic schools were the same. But they are not. I realized that when I met other teachers from other Catholic schools. They would be surprised when I told them about my two students with Down syndrome—They would say, "I don't get paid enough to teach these children or I am not trained to do this." That's when I knew we were unique.

Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian shared an experience similar to her colleague's:

> You know, I was so shocked when I heard another [Catholic school] teacher asked me why I said yes to teach these children [children with Down syndrome]. She told me that I should ask for more pay or at least for an aide. I could not believe it.

Even with such an overwhelming unfavorable response from other Catholic schools, recalling these experiences did not evoke anger in the parent's responses. This was evident in Arianna's mother's following statement. "They might have their reasons. I am just happy St. Marian opened their doors to us. We are here now."

"Maria (staff member who first interacts with potential families) gives them hope and Sister (Teresa) gives them the confidence," said Lisa, a teacher at St. Marian, who recalls first welcoming a child with Down syndrome.

"If I recall correctly, there were tears when I said yes to a parent (of a child with Down syndrome). They just could not believe it," disclosed Sr. Teresa as she recalled the first time, she welcomed a child with Down syndrome at St. Marian. Her narrative of how Arianna was received at St. Marian was especially stirring:

> She [Arianna] came to us in a stroller. She did not walk on her own. She needed help with everything. Maria [staff member] and I talked to [Arianna's] mom and encouraged her to let Arianna to walk when she came to school. I knew she could. So on the first day of school she showed up in her uniform and with her backpack. No stroller ever again. I was so proud of her.

"She will not go into the school in the morning unless she sees Sr. Teresa. She looks for her," shared Arianna's parents about Arianna's daily practice when arriving at school each morning. "She waits for Sister [Teresa] to call her name and shake her hand and then she will go to class. Every day she does this." The gratitude these parents felt for the welcoming space St. Marian provided them and their children was unmistakable. Despite the challenging journeys in getting there the parents credited the wellbeing of their children to this one school saying yes and opening their doors to welcome their children. Trying hard to hold back tears, Xavier's mother put in words the overwhelming gratitude she felt toward the entire St. Marian school community. "We will always be indebted to everyone at this school. Thank you for giving all my children, especially Xavier, the opportunity. You know, he loves them, and they love him."

"I don't know where he will go once he graduates," tearfully expressed Xavier's mother. "What Catholic high school will accept him? I may have to home study him because I don't think I will have any other option. I think that is my biggest challenge. Not knowing about his

future." All the parents shared a similar dilemma when it came to answering the question of challenges. They had disclosed their difficult journey of finding the school that would accept their child and were extremely happy and content with the environment and education they were receiving there but what they all dreaded is what may lay ahead for their children. They shuddered at the thought of reliving their experiences when the time will arrive to enroll their child in a Catholic high school.

Research indicates that parents of children with disabilities are required to assist the school in additional fundraisers which help fund the resources needed to support their children. The additional fees and obligatory supplemental fundraising for these families indicates the way these families are typically treated in Catholic schools. When the parent participants were asked about their experience in covering the cost of their child's education, they indicated that they were not required to carry any additional financial burden to have their child enrolled and served at St. Marian. One of the parents even disclosed that they were offered a substantial financial discount should the need arise. All the participants noted that their financial status did not allow them to receive any additional supports through government programs and they paid for their child's medical needs out of pocket or through their medical insurance.

The mother of Xavier, a student with Down syndrome, said:

> We don't get any special treatments. Nowhere. We pay for the therapists or any supports we receive. But when it comes to the school's tuition, my husband and I will make all the sacrifices because this is the best thing to happen to all my children. This is an investment for them. An investment for life.

The other parents of children with Down syndrome provided a similar averment that acknowledged the financial sacrifice parents made to send their children to Catholic school but concurred that the supports provided by St. Marian were invaluable in comparison to the tuition charged.

Summary for Research Question 2

There are several challenges to serving students with Down syndrome in an elementary Catholic school.

The findings that emerged from the data related to challenges in serving students with Down syndrome aligned with the literature that noted the limitations schools face with regard to finances and resources that are needed to support a conducive learning environment for students with disabilities. These challenges may further aggravate the issue of acquiring assistive technology, instructional aides and continued professional development for the staff and faculty. It is evident from the data that often times the teachers, staff, and principal have to design and implement the programs for students with Down syndrome in a Catholic school context with little to no technical assistance from the Department of Catholic schools. Even though the participants recognized these challenges, they did not find them significant enough to cease their commitment to students with Down syndrome and their families. Unlike the literature in the area of challenges and its effect on schools and their willingness to welcome students with special needs, the community at St. Marian did not believe that these challenges left them isolated or entirely without support. They believed these challenges were overcome by the leadership of the principal, the focused dedication of the teachers and unwavering support of the parents.

Summary

This chapter presented an exploration of the study's findings by two research questions. The findings identified how an elementary Catholic school serves students with Down syndrome and what challenges exist in providing such a service. The results indicated the strong role of the mission of Catholic schools in the school's fulfillment of its purpose. This was complimented by the personal faith of the community seeped in the Catholic Social Teachings. The findings also helped identify the process by which the school community created and sustained a culture of care. This was evident through the practice of caring in the school's policies, procedures, and program. The explicated data also identified the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome and spoke specifically to the challenges of financial resources, opportunities for continued professional development and the challenges related to the limitations in advocacy and continuing the culture of caring in future Catholic education settings. It is important to consider the implications of these findings. To that end, Chapter 5 includes the implications of these results and offers suggestions for future research in the area of Catholic schools serving students with Down syndrome.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout history the mission of Catholic schools has been clear: Catholic schools must strive to serve children with varied learning needs. However, despite calls for inclusion from the Vatican, the USCCB, and efforts from trained administrators and professionals to help facilitate inclusion in schools there is a lack of research and data that supports these initiatives extended to students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools.

Although called by our vocation and the mission of Catholic schools, students with disabilities (SWD) are underserved in Catholic education. Only approximately 1% of the nation's SWD population (67,000 students) attend private schools with 40% identified as Catholic (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a). Despite the small number, SWD and peers that struggle are attending our schools and therefore, must be included meaningfully and served successfully.

Catholic school principals tend to be the main decision makers in admission decisions and, many times, these principals have limited experience with SWD. For many Catholic school principals, professional preparation in the areas of exceptionality, special education law and procedure, and interventions or accommodations are often hurdles faced in the path of accepting children with Down syndrome. This research aimed to learn how one Catholic elementary school serves students with Down syndrome and what challenges it faces in providing these services.

This case study makes a radical discovery by revealing the myths surrounding the service of children with Down syndrome. The research helped dispel those myths with the hope to further encourage Catholic schools to open their doors to students with Down syndrome. While

part of the purpose of this study was to create a guide to be adopted by other Catholic schools, the study in turn revealed how St. Marian school does not employ any exclusive policies and procedures when welcoming and serving students with Down syndrome. The school community prides itself in embracing its students with Down syndrome just like it does all its students. The findings determine how the school successfully serves its students with Down syndrome by developing a shared framework steeped in its mission and CST, under the auspices and leadership of a strong leader who creates a culture of collaboration involving all stakeholders devoted to serving all children, and by employing inclusive supports and practices that create opportunities for all its students.

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to allow educational leaders, teachers, administrators, and church leaders to gain valuable insight into a vulnerable population that exists within the Catholic school context. This study will dispel the myths around the admission and service of students with Down syndrome in Catholic schools and will inform educational leaders on how to create and sustain inclusive environments aligned with Catholic Social Teachings.

The significance of this case study lay in witnessing and documenting one elementary Catholic school's experience of creating, developing, establishing, and modeling an inclusion environment that serves the needs of its students with Down syndrome. This study will ultimately provide data to those in similar Catholic school settings in developing and implementing fully inclusive environments.

St. Marian Catholic elementary school was chosen as the research site using a convenient and purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is used when a densely information-rich

case (Patton, 2002) is chosen for an in-depth and intensive study. The primary reason for selecting St. Marian was its focus on serving students with Down syndrome when many of the Catholic schools in this large west coast archdiocese were not inclusive at this level. In my own experience and knowledge as an assistant superintendent for Catholic schools there are currently fewer than five elementary schools in the archdiocese that operate schools that serve students with Down syndrome. The research question was best suited to the inquiry made at this school site and the information and data gathered was significant in creating landmark and foundational cases for all Catholic schools in their mission to serve SWD. From this research emerged over 20 hours of recorded semi-structured interviews, 678 significant statements, 435 excerpts from 38 codes, and 23 code applications.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research question for this case study is based on a review of the related and relevant literature on inclusion in Catholic schools and was developed naturally based on what issues were important and how issues about disability and inclusive education at St. Marian Catholic elementary school were examined (Berg, 2004).

1. How does a Catholic elementary school serve students with Down syndrome?
2. What are the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome in a Catholic elementary school?

Summary of the Findings

The findings revealed the success with which St. Marian Catholic elementary school serves students with Down syndrome. With a shared framework based on a mission-based

vocation steeped in the Catholic Social Teachings, St. Marian collaboratively built its capacity to become an inclusive Catholic elementary school serving students with Down syndrome.

It is evident from the data gathered that the mission statement of St. Marian school is suffused into all the aspects of the school's operations. The Catholic faith of the teachers and staff, and their collective mission as Catholic school educators was significant in why the community welcomed students with Down syndrome. The school developed a shared framework in which the principal, staff, and faculty unanimously believed that it was their duty and responsibility to create a welcoming environment for all children, without any exceptions. "Let the children come to me" was the unified vernacular resoundingly quoted by all the participants.

The participants also provided exceeding credence to the leadership of Sr. Teresa for living out the mission of the school and being the key reason why St. Marian opened its doors to students with Down syndrome. The findings note Sister's leadership especially in her behaviors that reflect the characteristics of a servant leader. Sr. Teresa made a conscious choice to serve first, is a strong empathetic and ethical leader, and leads in ways to serve the greater good of those who are placed in her care. Her focus was always placed in building strong communal relationships to support the mission of St. Marian School. In understanding how to serve students with Down syndrome it is imperative to note that the findings of this study place a strong emphasis on the leadership of an administrator who places the mission of the school and service to all students in the forefront. Sr. Teresa's confidence in the mission of the school and her unwavering support to the teachers, students, and parents makes St. Marian an exceptional school.

A key finding that surfaced in interviews with Sr. Teresa and the teachers was that often students with Down syndrome are not accepted into schools because of their physical attributes and the misconceptions that surround the abilities of students with Down syndrome. Sr. Teresa strongly believed, based on her extensive experience of working with children with Down syndrome, which the physical attributes do not translate to physical limitations for these children. It was evident from the data that children with Down syndrome may look different from their counterparts but do not require service delivery different from their non-disabled peers, thereby making an even stronger case for welcoming students with Down syndrome into Catholic schools. The findings also surfaced how in some cases students with Down syndrome outperformed their peers academically and socially; and required lesser accommodations and modifications.

The findings demonstrated how the St. Marian community with its dedication to providing an inclusive education, a history of serving the marginalized, and the autonomy to create communities that support all learners heeded to the call of the Catholic Social Teachings, that are the foundational teachings of the Catholic Church. Even though the participants did not name the CST, the affiliation of their own mission to the tenets of the CST is completely discernible. The findings revealed how the CST in their essence was embodied in the operations and practices at St. Marian School. Based on their experience of successfully serving students with Down syndrome just as they would serve all other students, from the point of admission to the time of matriculation, the participants made an emphatic call to action to the Catholic school system. An appeal was made to Catholic schools to open their doors to children with Down syndrome and provide them the same opportunities as all other children. It was evident from the

data that the teachers strongly believed that teaching students with Down syndrome does not require a formal degree in special education or any exceptional services in the classroom. They were hopeful that other Catholic schools in the system would be open to serving its most vulnerable through the CST's call to family, community, and participation, and focusing on the life and dignity of the human person.

The St. Marian community serves it students with Down syndrome was by its institution of a culture of collaboration. In addition to raising skills, this emphasis on collaborative professional growth seems also to impact dispositions. The faculty and staff believed that true caring was defined by their unwavering dedication to create a safe and loving environment for those placed in their care. There was a unanimous welcoming response from all the teachers towards children with Down syndrome regardless of their years of teaching or service at St. Marian. There was an overall excitement of serving students with Down syndrome amongst the faculty and this dedication was supported by the principal, parents, and community. The teachers and staff believed it was their personal duty and obligation to be charged with the protection, welfare, and maintenance of the children with Down syndrome. The collected data provides overwhelming evidence that the parents of children with Down syndrome choose to attend and remain at St. Marian because of the exceeding level of care their children received at the school. They believed that the environment of care and the openness to collaboration at St. Marian unconditionally catered to the needs of their children and helped them grow and actualize their dreams. The participants believed that the relationship of trust between the faculty, staff, parents and principal is key in maintaining an inclusive environment at St. Marian School and each of these participants responded reciprocatively to the care shown toward them. The teachers

acknowledged that without the unwavering support of the parents, in a situation where formal supports are limited; their work would not achieve its intended results. The teachers, principal, and parents of the children with Down syndrome shared a relationship that was based on trust and mutual understanding and one that was built on the common ground of collaboration. The deep gratitude for the unwavering dedication and commitment of the principal and teachers was palpable in the interviews with the parents.

The findings exhibited that St. Marian School replaced its traditional isolated classrooms with a more flexible structure that facilitates collaboration across the school staff, faculty, and administration. This collaborative culture and devotion to caring for all its students was foundational is how St. Marian serves it Down syndrome student population. This culture of collaboration permits the teachers to develop coordinated approaches focused on addressing specific needs of individual students. This was evident through the examples teachers provided of how they approached learning in their classroom and the supports and opportunities they offered which were inclusive in nature. The teachers reiterated how the skills adopted to support students with Down syndrome help them better address the unique learning needs of all their students. The data revealed that at no time did the teachers have to create exclusive conditions for the inclusion of students with Down syndrome. On the contrary, including students with Down syndrome in the mainstream classroom enhanced learning for all students. The teachers at St. Marian recognized that all students learn differently, and their goal is to provide all the students with the instruction they need to succeed as learners and achieve high standards alongside their friends and classmates. Apart from some minor adjustments and accommodations

made for the students with Down syndrome serving students with Down syndrome was not markedly different from serving all other students.

The findings also revealed the challenges in serving students with Down syndrome that included limited financial resources, continuation of professional development for its faculty and staff, the need for advocacy for students with Down syndrome and the continuation of care in the Catholic school system. While the findings acknowledged these challenges that support the literature review in the area, the St. Marian community remains steadfast and committed to its mission of serving students with Down syndrome. It was evident from the exploration of the data that all the teachers at St. Marian shared a distinct characteristic that imbued a deep love for teaching but an even greater love for learning. A prevailing theme among the teachers, reference to the perceptible lack of resources, was their interdependence as a team and their astounding call to mission.

The mission of St. Marian School was on the forefront when the teachers adduced their narrations of success and struggle while living out their vocation as Catholic school educators. When asked about their challenges, there was a marked level of introspection rather than blame on the circumstances that were placed before them. Their responses often defied the expectations as laid out by research conducted in the area. They expressed a deep gratitude for including them in the mission of serving children and suggested that the challenges could be removed through an increased effort on their own part as teachers rather than the responsibility of anyone else.

Reference to the data collected form parent interviews, a common theme that emerged in challenges parents faced in educating their children in Catholic schools was their experiences at other Catholic schools they pursued prior to St. Marian. These schools commonly cited the lack

of resources, formalized training in special education, and other classroom supports which ultimately resulted in refusing admission to children with Down syndrome. To this, the teachers at St. Marian responded by acknowledging the importance of a formalized educational and training program to support students of special and diverse needs but they also noted that the lack of such training should not be a reason to refrain from serving students with Down syndrome. All but one grade level had an instructional aide to support the teacher in the classroom. The teachers recognized that additional support in the classroom would be an immense help for the teacher and should they need such support the principal would make sure they receive it.

In a stark contrast to the literature that finds special education services in Catholic schools to be funded mostly by parents either directly or through enhanced tuition for students with special needs, the data collected from St. Marian School does not support this literature. Despite the acknowledged limitations of finances and resources the burden of financially supporting students with Down syndrome was not transferred to the parents. Sr. Teresa was formidable in finding resources beyond the tuition collected from the parents and did not create polices or practices that would present further hurdles for parents who were already struggling to find an appropriate environment to educate their children.

Previous studies have found that Catholic school teachers have to often translate programs in the Catholic school context to support students with special needs with little to no technical assistance resulting in the reluctance to include students with special needs Catholic schools. The findings from this case study confirm that teachers do carry the additional hardship of creating and implementing resources for instruction to students with Down syndrome, but the lack of the technical assistance does not leave them feeling isolated or without support or

reluctant to further serve students with Down syndrome. The teachers believed that the autonomy of exploring various techniques, the steady support from parents and the administration and the technical support received from the Club 21 organization was sufficient to help them become better educators to these children. It was evident that the teachers though acknowledging the challenges of inadequate funding and formalized training did not find themselves inadequate in supporting the mission of the school. When asked what supports could assist them in their service delivery to students with Down syndrome the teachers listed additional time for instructional planning, continued support from parents, hiring of a part-time instructional aide, when possible, to support all diverse learners in the classroom, and professional development from the DCS focusing on service delivery for SWD.

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions

The following subsections contain responses to some commonly asked questions regarding serving SWD.

Question 1. Don't students with children Down syndrome belong in schools with special services? The case study at St. Marian School reveals that children with Down syndrome can be successfully served in general education classroom with their non-disabled peers. The school did not have to provide any special services or exclusive conditions for the students with Down syndrome confirming that Catholic schools with attributes such as St. Marian can effectively serve students with Down syndrome in its classrooms without establishing any special programs, policies, or procedures.

Question 2. What testing procedures, admission policies and student contracts are required to admit students with Down syndrome in a Catholic School? In serving children with

Down syndrome over the past 6 years the school has not found the need to create any exclusive or stand-alone policies for children with special needs or in this case with children Down syndrome. These students follow the same admission procedures as all other students. Students are tested for placement and not for the purpose of admission. The principal meets with each family and identifies the needs of the child and assures them that the school community will put forward its best efforts to serve their child. The parents of children with Down syndrome students sign the same contract as all other parents. All students, including children with Down syndrome, are held to same expectations listed in the school handbook. There are no exclusive disciplinary policies for students with special needs. As evidenced in the case study, the school community takes great pride in treating all children equally. The parents found this practice notable in creating an environment of care for their children.

Question 3. How will children with Down syndrome matriculate to the next grade or high schools if they do not master the standards for each grade? Accommodating and modifying curriculum may in some cases result in children with Down syndrome not attaining the mastery of skills and standards for their respective grade levels. This scenario is not uncommon for general education students struggling with content and attaining a mastery of skills as well. St. Marian school follows the same procedures for its students with Down syndrome as it does for its general education students which includes creating STEP plans and documentation to note the accommodations provided so the services can continue beyond each grade level and into high school.

Question 4. Don't teachers need special training to serve children with Down syndrome? The teachers at St. Marian school believe that children with Down syndrome only look physically different from their peers but are children with amiable personalities who are keen to learn and resolute in facing their own personal challenges. The teachers appreciated the opportunities of professional development in serving students with Down syndrome but did not believe they needed formal degrees in special education to serve children with Down syndrome. The teachers conducted their own research and pursued online and cost-free resources to support the students with Down syndrome in the classroom, but they also admitted that they did the same for all the other students in their classroom. They acknowledged that most important aspects of serving students with Down syndrome was the openness to welcoming students with Down syndrome, being led by a supportive principal, and maintaining a culture of meaningful collaboration between their peers and parents.

Question 5. How do you ensure that all teachers and staff are supportive of the mission of serving SWD? One of the most important roles of a principal is hiring and maintaining a staff and faculty that support the mission of the school. Sr. Teresa was recognized as a strong leader who placed the inclusive mission of the school in the forefront and deliberately hired for mission. The expectation of creating an inclusive environment was made evidently clear to any candidates seeking employment at St. Marian School. Sustained dialogue with teachers, professional development opportunities and the allowance for adopting new teaching techniques in the classroom were a few ways Sr. Teresa helped the faculty and staff continue to support the school's mission. The teachers and staff reciprocated these efforts of support with an unwavering dedication to the collective mission of the school community.

Question 6. What additional costs are incurred by the school when serving students with Down syndrome? The data from the study verified that the school incurred no additional costs in serving students with Down syndrome. The teachers were provided professional development through the cost-free services provided by Club 21, the non-profit organization supporting schools and teachers serving students with Down syndrome. Teachers and parents collaborated in adjusting curriculum or providing in-classroom or supplemental at-home supports. The school did not hire any instructional aides to support a pull out or one-on-one learning environment and the teachers did not find this necessary in better serving students with Down syndrome. The teachers also acknowledged that should the need for aides arise the principal would find the resources to provide any additional supports.

Question 7. Who covers any additional costs of serving students with Down syndrome? Research suggested that historically Catholic schools have transferred the burden of educational support costs to the parents of SWD. At St. Marian school the parents of children with Down syndrome are charged the same tuition as the other parents. In some cases, parents of children with Down syndrome have been allowed to access the tuition assistance program at the school. Sr. Teresa, principal at St. Marian, strongly believes that it is an injustice to create any hurdles for parents with Down syndrome since they experience many financial challenges and discriminatory practices in society. Should any additional costs arise Sr. Teresa works tirelessly in seeking philanthropic support, federal funding, and cost-free resources f schools.

Question 8. How do the non-disabled children and their parents respond to including students with Down syndrome in the classroom? Based on the interviews with the participants, the community of St. Marian found itself blessed to serve students with Down syndrome as it

enriched their lives as teachers, students, and administrators. Teachers found their students to be increasingly kind and compassionate due to the opportunities they had of interacting with children with Down syndrome. When asked how children responded to any accommodations or modifications made in the classroom for the students with Down syndrome, the teachers shared that the children understood how each of them have unique needs and recognized how each of them would is treated fairly. Based on the data gathered, the parents of non-disabled students applauded the school for creating a welcoming environment for all children. They witnessed their children blossoming in a caring community where the school normalized inclusion and the children recognized that they were unique but not different. The principal and teachers did not report any concerns raised by parents of non-disabled children.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Implementing effective inclusion education may require teachers, principals, administrators, and leaders of diocese to rethink many longstanding approaches to enrollment, retention, curriculum, instruction, and delivery. The findings from this study have implications for the field of inclusion, particularly in serving children with Down syndrome in Catholic schools. Catholic school educators, principals, administrators as well as diocesan leaders may find the results of this study beneficial in welcoming children with Down syndrome to their schools and creating greater inclusivity in the Catholic school system. Following are certain considerations including teacher attitude, professional development, administrative recommendations that may further support inclusive education in Catholic schools.

Establish a System-wide Expectation of Inclusion

A system wide effort to promote a more inclusive system of Catholic education requires coordinated efforts from policy to implementation. Policy at the highest levels must affirm the right of children with Down syndrome to be included alongside their non-disabled peers in a general education setting. Although policy is critical, the long-standing misconceptions regarding the capacities of all students to thrive within an inclusive classroom often represent the greatest barriers to progress. Efforts to foster inclusion must help to counter these long-standing misconceptions and to support and educate teachers, school administrators and parents so that children with disabilities experience effective, welcoming schools and classrooms that are able to meet their needs. Parents also need to be included as important partners in their children's education to help assure the best outcomes. The mission of Catholic schools should focus on welcoming all children and strive to create policies and practices on the foundation of CST. The mission must hope to achieve for all schools a respect for human dignity, equity, advocacy, and solidarity.

Build Systems of Data Collection

It is evident that efforts are being made to gather data on inclusion as a system at the archdiocesan level in the city this case study was conducted even though data on the degree to which students with Down syndrome are included with their non-disabled peers has been historically limited. It is imperative that diocese that are seeking to support the inclusion of students with disabilities, especially students with Down syndrome, should invest in the collection of accurate data on the degree to which children with disabilities have access to the same schools attended by their non-disabled peers. Simply measuring school enrollment is not

sufficient. The data should speak to the outreach made to students with Down syndrome and their families, the programs offered to these students, the resources and supports provided, and the efficacy of these programs. It is critical that inclusion-focused indicators be represented in annual census data collected from Catholic schools.

Schools should also (a) measure the degree to which students with disabilities are learning necessary skills and content, and (b) include markers that measure students with disabilities in diocesan measures of educational progress, namely the STAR (standardized test scores) test scores for the system. The purpose and objective of such data and scores should not have high-stakes consequences for the students themselves but should rather help identify schools and communities in need of support in better including and serving their students with disabilities.

Identify Model Inclusive Schools for the Purpose of Training and Observation

Professional development and inclusion training can help teachers develop the pedagogical skills to include a wide range of students, but often it is important for educators to observe successful inclusive schools. Although it is believed that that all schools can develop inclusive practices, the recommendation is to identify some schools that have successfully served students with Down syndrome and to utilize those schools to serve as models and possibly even as demonstration sites for the training of inclusive teachers and principals. Children with Down syndrome may have some unique learning needs and but observing the ease with which schools fully include students with Down syndrome in their general education classrooms is an effective method on providing the necessary exemplars for other schools to follow. Model inclusive schools provide an environment in which those practices can be refined and improved. Engaging

schools such as St. Marian also provides other schools to extend their levels of collaborations amongst schools, share resources and expertise and further create a common ground for collaboration.

Provide Educators with a Robust in-service Preparation on Inclusive Education

This case study revealed how students with Down syndrome did not require major accommodations or modifications to be mainstreamed into the general education classrooms. Evidence from previous research suggests that teachers generally support the concept of inclusive education but question their own ability to teach in an inclusive classroom. Many teachers attribute their hesitation to include students with disabilities to a lack of proper training which results in the various myths surrounding the service of children with Down syndrome. A large study conducted in the United States indicates that around one-fifth of general education teachers who teach students with disabilities report that they do not have adequate support, and one-third feel that they were not adequately trained to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Blackorby et al., 2007). Multiple studies have found that teachers who have received training on inclusion are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Chiner & Cardona, 2013). It is recommended then that providing professional development and training in the area of inclusion for teachers can influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Most of the times barriers and challenges such as lack of adequate knowledge, facilities, skills, and trainings shape teachers' perceptions of inclusion. Continued professional development and support in content creation and delivery can markedly improve teacher attitudes toward inclusion and result in greater number of schools opening their doors to students with Down syndrome. It is imperative that principals and teachers of general education settings

need improved training and resources in order to create effective, inclusive learning environments that foster both the academic and social growth of students with and without disabilities.

Regardless of their disability status, all students benefit from a combination of hands-on, auditory, and visual learning opportunities in the classroom. Children with Down syndrome have particular strengths in visual learning and processing, and teachers can capitalize on these strengths in the classroom through multimedia instruction. All efforts should be made to seek adequate funding through private and public funds to provide teachers and principals with system wide supports and opportunity to be in-serviced in the area of inclusive instruction.

It is also recommended that diocesan level offices create effective liaisons with non-profit organizations that currently support schools that serve students with Down syndrome. These include organizations such as Club 21 and the National Catholic Board on Inclusion. A system-based liaison with such organization allows schools an ease in navigating the challenges of providing supports to their students with Down syndrome and reduces the financial strains that may fall upon these schools.

School sites that have been identified as model sites for imparting an inclusive environment for their students with Down syndrome can also utilize their teachers as resources to conduct appropriate teacher training via training cohorts and networking. This opportunity to network with teachers directly engaged in the work and in similar school environments can help teachers support each other through their journeys of inclusion at their own sites. Sharing resources in this manner can be extremely cost effective to schools unable to afford external sources of professional development and training.

Promote and Celebrate Inclusivity

Given the cultural shift that inclusive education requires in most societies, changing public opinion about the importance of inclusive education especially for students with Down syndrome is important. For example, providing images of successfully included students with Down syndrome in general education classes can help to establish inclusive education as a cultural norm among the Catholic school community. Engaging highly visible champions of inclusion in Catholic school settings and showcasing successfully inclusive schools via the diocesan website and social media can help promote acceptance among educators and create demand for inclusive programs among parents of students with and without disabilities. Celebrating days reserved for the recognition of the special needs community, such as the Down syndrome awareness, Autism Awareness, and Deaf Community recognition day. Celebrating these days annually as a system nationally will strongly display the solidarity Catholic schools have with their vulnerable brothers and sisters in their communities and bring awareness to schools that may not currently serve students with Down syndrome. See Table 2.

Table 2

Implications for Practice and Policy

Recommendation	Guiding CST principal	Responsible parties	Action items
Establish a system-wide expectation of inclusion.	• Life and dignity of the human person • Rights and responsibilities	• Arch/diocesan leaders	• Create policies that affirm the right of children with Down syndrome base policies on the foundation of CST
Build systems of data collection.	• Care for God's creation • Solidarity	• Arch/diocesan leaders • School leaders • Independent entities such NCEA, national catholic board on full inclusion etc.	• Invest in the collection of accurate data on the degree to which children have access to catholic schools • Collect data on outreach made to students with down syndrome, programs offered and efficacy of the programs • Represent inclusion-focused indicators in annual Catholic school census data • Measure degree to which SWD are learning necessary skills and content • Include markers that measure SWD in diocesan measures of educational progress
Identify model inclusive schools for purpose of training and observation.	• Call to family, community, and participation	• Arch/diocesan leaders	• Identify schools that have successfully served students with down syndrome and utilize the schools as models for professional development • Replicate policies and practices based on the model school
Provide educators with robust in-service preparation on inclusive education.	• Care for God's creations	• Arch/diocesan leaders • School leaders • University programs • NCEA and other external organizations supporting teacher preparation and professional development	• Provide training on hands-on, auditory and visual learning opportunities • Create liaisons with non-profit organizations such as club 21 that support teacher professional development in areas of multimedia instruction etc.

Table 2 continued

Implications for Practice and Policy

Promote and celebrate inclusion.	• Call to family, community, and participation • Care for God's creations • Solidarity	• Arch/diocesan leaders • Teachers • School leaders • Universities • Organizations such as NCEA, etc.	• Create a web campaign representing successful stories of student with down syndrome in Catholic schools • Engage champions of inclusion on websites and social media • Celebrate days reserved to recognize vulnerable groups such as down syndrome day, autism awareness day, etc.

Recommendation for Future Studies

This case study illustrated how a Catholic elementary school served students with Down syndrome. This section outlines recommendations for future study.

A recommendation for future study is to further examine inclusive policies at the diocesan level of other dioceses specifically in the area of service to students with Down syndrome. This study examined the policies currently at the one large west coast diocese. Future studies in other diocese would help replicate similar and effective policies for diocese nationwide. These studies could strongly affect attitude towards inclusion and help start conversations about inclusion of Down syndrome students at a national level.

This study also uncovered certain challenges that Catholic schools face when serving students with Down syndrome. The challenges were namely availability of resources, continued professional development and advocacy. Literature in area has found that teacher attitudes toward serving students with Down syndrome were dependent on the teachers' confidence and formal training in special education. All the teacher participants in this study had earned their master's degree in education from a reputable university but found that there was limited focus on special education and inclusive studies. Future studies could examine teacher preparation

programs in Catholic universities and explore their role in building teacher capacities in the area of serving SWD. This examination could help explore how teacher preparation programs, especially for Catholic school teachers, could be support teachers serving SWD without having to earn a specialized degree in special education. A similar study could be conducted for leadership formation programs at the university level.

Based on the findings of this case study St. Marian Catholic elementary school has successfully opened its doors to students with Down syndrome in spite of the challenges it faced. This success was largely dependent on the principal's leadership qualities and the focused outreach to secure resources to fulfill the school's mission of welcoming all students. This study surfaced certain resources solely dedicated to serving students with Down syndrome and their families, such Club 21 and the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion. All the participants spoke to the significant role these organizations played in the success of their children with Down syndrome. It would be beneficial to study the systems and structure of these organizations, and the supports they offer to Catholic schools. These studies would be beneficial in investigating resources that could further support Catholic schools that are strapped for resources.

Conclusion

Catholic schools are guided by the mission of the Catholic Church that is universal and all-embracing. In its role as being institutions that promote and deliver a socially just education to all children, Catholic schools are called to put into practice the refrain, "All are welcome." However, as a Church, particularly through a portion of our Catholic School history, the inclusion of struggling family members or those with disabilities has been a challenge. Yet, in

the inclusion of all learners and serving all of God's children is not only necessary but also possible.

This study identified effective practices, frameworks, and interventions integrated at a Catholic elementary school to illustrate what is possible for Catholic schools when serving SWD, especially students with Down syndrome. The school community established that inclusion should be a foundational element that represents Catholic schools thereby allowing schools to fulfill their mission of serving all children while steeped in the church's Catholic social teachings.

APPENDIX A

Permission to Research From the Department of Catholic Schools

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

LOS ANGELES | SANTA BARBARA | VENTURA

August 31, 2020

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles recognizes the value of high-quality research for improving education and serving the needs of future generations. This letter certifies that the Department of Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles grants Christina Arellano, a doctoral candidate at Loyola Marymount University, permission to commence a study on how an elementary catholic school serves its students with Down Syndrome.

I am aware that Ms. Arellano intends to conduct a case study at Nativity Catholic Elementary School, El Monte. The case study will include a document review, observations, and semi-structured interviews with the Principal, Faulty, Staff and parents/guardians. The research will include protocols that intend to:

• Protect all participants from risk of harm, violations of rights, and loss of privacy

• Protect the educational process from unwarranted distractions and interruptions

• Protect resources, including data, from misappropriation for private or unjustified use

This case study investigates and analyzes teachers' and administrators' experiences of serving children with Down Syndrome in an attempt to gather data on how the program was created and developed, and what exemplars can be provided to have the program further embraced by other schools in the ADLA. Additionally, this data and research aims to build on the vision and concept that inclusive education in Catholic schools is key to fulfilling the mission of Catholic schools, and the authentic realization of the Catholic Social teachings which is the foundation of Catholic communities.

Nativity Catholic elementary school was selected as a site for Ms. Arellano's research due to its service to students with Down Syndrome. All participants will be given the assurance of the confidentiality in their participation and will be provided the option to decline involvement in this study. The interview protocol will cover areas that describe the process of admission, retention, and service to students with the said challenges and disability.

For the purposes of publishing the findings, I authorize the identification of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles as the context/location of the participating school. However, it is understood that the participating elementary school will not be identified by name in the published dissertation. Please reference the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Handbook [13.6.1] for further information related to testing and research in schools.

The Department of Catholic Schools supports this research and anticipates receiving a comprehensive final report to inform our leadership and work.

Sincerely,

Paul Escala
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

Archdiocese of Los Angeles • 3424 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90010 • lacatholicschools.org • 213.637.7300

APPENDIX B

Introductory Letter to Participants

Dear [name of participant]

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and the purpose of this research.As a doctoral candidate at Loyola Marymount University, I have received permission from the Department of Catholic Schools at the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) to commence a study on how an elementary catholic school serves its students with Down syndrome. This case study investigates and analyzes teachers' and administrators' experiences of serving children with Down syndrome to gather data on how the program was created and developed, and what exemplars can be provided to have the program further embraced by other schools in the ADLA.

Additionally, this data and research aims to build on the vision and concept that inclusive education in Catholic schools is key to fulfilling the mission of Catholic schools, and the authentic realization of the Catholic Social teachings which is the foundation of Catholic communities.

Nativity Catholic elementary school was selected as a site for Ms. Arellano's research due to its service to students with Down syndrome. All participants will be given the assurance of the confidentiality in their participation and will be provided the option to decline involvement in this study. The interview protocol will cover areas that describe the process of admission, retention, and service to students with the said challenges and disability.

The case study will include a document review, observations, and semi-structured interviews with the Principal, Faulty, Staff and parents/guardians. The research will include protocols that intend to:

- Protect all participants from risk of harm, violations of rights, and loss of privacy
- Protect the educational process from unwarranted distractions and interruptions
- Protect resources, including data, from misappropriation for private or unjustified use

I truly appreciate your eagerness in sharing your stories and experiences in supporting these exceptional students you serve at Nativity. I am honored and privileged to study your school site and provide the much needed guidance our system needs in opening more schools to students with Down Syndrome. This research will inspire foundational and long-term systemic change that will provide further supports to our teachers, administrators and parents in our mission of taking care of the most vulnerable amongst us.

All meetings will take place via zoom. I will work according to your schedules. I am also enclosing a copy of the Informed Consent and your Bill of Rights as participants in this research. Please peruse the same for your kind reference. Please know that all interviews and data will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this research. Thank you again and I am looking forward to speaking with you.

Most sincerely,
Christina Arellano

APPENDIX C

Two Page Informed Consent Form

Loyola Marymount University
Informed Consent Form

TITLE: Full Inclusion in Catholic Schools: How one Catholic Elementary School is serving its students with Down Syndrome

INVESTIGATOR: Christina Arellano, Ed. D in Educational Leadership, Loyola Marymount University, 626-650-4851

ADVISOR: (if applicable) Dr. Lauren Casella

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate which is designed to study how one Catholic elementary school serves it students with Down Syndrome. You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview in person or remotely and that will be recorded via audio recording. The study is expected to be completed over a period of four weeks.

RISKS: Risks associated with this study include: nervousness and discomfort on the part of the participants as the interviews pertain to children with Down Syndrome. This may surface some emotions they may have experienced in the past and all efforts will be made to provide the ease and comfort in making the interviews semi-structured to allow for the flexibility in responding to these emotions. You will be reminded through a variety of ways that their participation is voluntary and that you can always opt out or stop an interview. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and how their identifying information will not be collected or impact their involvement with the school site.

BENEFITS: Your participation will serve in creating a greater awareness in procedures and support of how to serve students with Down Syndrome that can be replicated at other Catholic Elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

INCENTIVES: Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. You will not be provided with any monetary incentives.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All research materials and consent forms will be stored in a password protected file. No names or identifiable characteristics will be available. Happy Scribe and Dedoose, the software and application that will be used to record the interviews and to analyze the transcript, have their own security elements to protect data. No identifiable data will be left on a transcript, except for a number to identify the interview. The sessions between the researcher and the participants will be audio recorded and transcribed, as they will become part of the data that is

analyzed. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled, your class standing or relationship with Loyola Marymount University.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. Christina Arellano, carellano@la-archdiocese.org. The summary will be available three months after the completion of the interview and study.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at David.Moffet@lmu.edu.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

APPENDIX D

Subjects Bill of Rights

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.

REFERENCES

Alton, S. (1998). Differentiation not discrimination: Delivering the curriculum for children with Down syndrome in mainstream schools. *Support for Learning, 13*(4), 167-173. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.00083

Amado, A. N., Stancliffe, R. J., McCarron, M., & McCallion, P. (2013). Social inclusion and community participation of individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, *51*(5), 360-375. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-51.5.360

Appl, D. J. (1998). Children with Down syndrome: Implications for adult-child interactions in inclusive settings. *Childhood Education, 75*(1), 39-43.

Aquinas College. (2021). *Integration of faith, culture, and life.* https://www.aquinascollege.edu/centers/center-for-catholic-education/themes-church-documents-catholic-education/integration-faith-culture-life/

Atkinson, P., & Coffey, A. (2004). Analyzing documentary realities. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 56-75). Sage.

Baker, E. T., Wang, M., & Walberg, H. (1995). The effects of inclusion on learning. *Educational Leadership, 52*(4), 33–35. https://www.weac.org/resource/june96/speced.htm

Barrett, W., & Randall, L. (2004). Investigating the circle of friends approach: adaptations and implications for practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 20*(4), 353–368. http://doi.org/10.1080/0266736042000314286

Bello, D. A. (2006). The status of special education services in Catholic high schools: Attributes, challenges, and needs. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 461-481. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200405

Bempechat, J., Boulay, B. A., Piergross, S. C., & Wenk, K. A. (2008). Beyond the rhetoric: Understanding achievement and motivation in Catholic school students. *Education and Urban Society, 40*(2), 167-178. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124507304178

Benedict XVI. (2010). *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation*. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html

Berg, B. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson Education.

Blackorby, J., Knokey, A.-M., Wagner, M., Levine, P., Schiller, E., & Sumi, C. (2007). *What makes a difference? Influences on outcomes for students with disabilities.* SRI International. http://www.seels.net/designdocs/SEELS_W1W3_FINAL.pdf

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research in education. an introduction to theory and methods* (2nd ed.). Pearson.

Bonfiglio, C. M., Faggella-Luby, M. N., & Smith, S. J. (2019). *Show me the data: Inclusion in Catholic schools* [Paper presentation]. National Catholic Education Association Conference, Chicago, IL.

Bonfiglio, C. M., & Kroh, K. (2020). Inclusion in Catholic schools: From inception to implementation. *Journal of Catholic Education, 23*(2), 138-164. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2302122020

Bouillet, D. (2013). Some aspects of collaboration in inclusive education - teachers' experiences. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, 3*(2), 93–117. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1129514). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1129514.pdf

Boyle, M. (2017). *Ensuring a place at the table: Serving students with disabilities in Catholic schools*. National Catholic Educational Association.

Boyle, M., & Bernards, P. (2016). *One spirit, one body: An agenda for serving students with disabilities in Catholic schools*. National Catholic Educational Association.

Boyle, M., & Hernandez, C. (2016). An investigation of the attitudes of Catholic school principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *20*(1), 190- 219. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2001092016

Brady, B. V. (2008). *Essential Catholic social thought*. Orbis Publishing.

Brock, M. E., Biggs, E. E., Carter, E. W., Cattey, G. N., & Raley, K. S. (2016). Implementation and generalization of peer support arrangements for students with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Special Education*, *49*(4), 221-232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466915594368

Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Holland, P. B. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good*. Harvard University Press.

Buckley, S., Bird, G., Sacks, B., & Archer, T. (2006). A comparison of mainstream and special education for teenagers with Down syndrome: Implications for parents and teachers. *Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 9*(3), 54–67. http://doi.org/10.3104/reports.295

Bulgren, J. A., Marquis, J. G., Deshler, D. D., Lenz, B. K., & Schumaker, J. B. (2013). The use and effectiveness of a question exploration routine in secondary-level English language arts classrooms. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *28*(4), 156-169. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12018

Burke, M. M., & Griffin, M. M. (2016). Students with developmental disabilities in Catholic schools: Examples in primary and secondary settings. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *19*(3), 197-220. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903102016

Canon Law Society of America & Catholic Church. (1983). *Code of canon law* (Latin-English ed.). Author.

Carlson, M. (2014). Aquinas on inclusion: Using the good doctor and catholic social teaching to build a moral case for inclusion in Catholic schools for children with special needs. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *18*(1), 62-78. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1801042014

Carter, E. W., Asmus, J., Moss, C. K., Biggs, E. E., Bolt, D. M., Born, T. L., Brock, M. E., Cattey, G. N., Chen, R., Cooney, M., Fesperman, E., Hochman, J. M., Huber, H. B., Lequia, J. L., Lyons, G., Moyseenko, K. A., Riesch, L. M., Shalev, R. A., Vincent, L. B., & Weir, K. (2016). Randomization evaluation of peer support arrangements to support the inclusion of high school students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *82*(2), 209-233. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402915598780

Carter, E. W., & Hughes, C. (2006). Including high school students with severe disabilities in general education classes: Perspectives of general and special educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 31*(2), 174–185. http://doi.org/10.1177/154079690603100209

Carter, E. W., Hughes, C., Guth, C. B., & Copeland, S. R. (2005). Factors influencing social interaction among high school students with intellectual disabilities and their general education peers. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 110*(5), 366–377. http://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017

Causton-Theoharis, J., & Theoharis, G. (2013). Does access matter? Time in general education and achievement for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *34*(6), 323-332. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513485448

Cawley, J., Hayden, S., Cade, E., & Baker-Kroczynski, S. (2002). Including students with disabilities into the general education science classroom. *Exceptional Children*, *68*(4), 423-435. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290206800401

Chiner, E., & Cardona, M. C. (2013). Inclusive education in Spain: How do skills, resources, and supports affect regular education teachers' perceptions of inclusion? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17*(5), 526–541. http://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.689864

Cole, C. M., Waldron, N., & Majd, M. (2004). Academic progress of students across inclusive and traditional settings. *Mental Retardation*, *42*(2), 136-144. https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765

Coleman, J. H., Hoffer, T., & Kilgore, S. (1982). *High school achievement: Public, Catholic, 201 and private schools compared*. Basic Books.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Crockett, J. B. (2019). Preparation of leaders for the special education in the 21st century. In Crockett, J. B., Billingsley, B., Boscardin, M. L. (Ed.), *Handbook of Leadership and Administration for Special Education* (pp. 60-78). Routledge.

Crowley, A. L., & Wall, S. (2007). Supporting children with disabilities in the Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *10*(4), 508-522. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1004082013

Cuckle, P., & Wilson, J. (2002). Social relationships and friendships among young people with Down's syndrome in secondary schools. *British Journal of Special Education, 29*(2), 66–71. http://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.00242

Cunningham, C. (1996). *Understanding Down syndrome: An introduction for parents.* Brookline Books.

Cunningham, M. P., Huchting, K. K., Fogarty, D., & Graf, V. (2017). Providing access for students with moderate disabilities: An evaluation of a professional development program at a Catholic elementary school. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *21*(1), 138-170. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2101072017

Curcic, S. (2009). Inclusion in PK-12: An international perspective. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(5), 517–538. http://doi.org/10.1080/13603110801899585

Dallavis, C. (2014). Culturally responsive caring and expectations for academic achievement in a Catholic school. *Journal of Catholic Education, 17*(2), 154-171. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1702082014

Davis, S. (1995). *America's public schools still segregated.* The Arc Department of Research and Program Services.

Dedoose Version 8.1, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2018). SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC. www.dedoose.com

DeFiore, L. (2006). The state of special education in Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *9*(4), 453-465. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0904062013

de Graaf, G., & van Hove, G. (2015). Learning to read in regular and special schools: A follow-up study of students with Down syndrome. *Life Span and Disability, 18*(1), 7–39. https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/6861430

Denscombe, M. (2014). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Dessemontet, R. S., Bless, G., & Morin, D. (2012). Effects of inclusion on the academic achievement and adaptive behaviour of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 56*(6), 579–587. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2011.01497.x

Dessemontet, R. S., & Bless, G. (2013). The impact of including children with intellectual disability in general education classrooms on the academic achievement of their low-, average-, and high achieving peers. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 38*(1), 23–30. http://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2012.757589

D'Haem, J. (2008). Special at school but lonely at home: An alternative friendship group for adolescents with Down syndrome. *Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 12*(2), 107–111. http://doi.org/10.3104/practice.2012

Dolva, A., Gustavsson, A., Borell, L., & Hemmingsson, H. (2011). Facilitating peer interaction – support to children with Down syndrome in mainstream schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 26*(2), 201–213. http://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2011.563607

Dudek, A. (2000). Making room for me: Including children with special needs [Special section]. *Momentum, 31*(2), 43-47.

Durow, W. P. (2013). Including and serving students with special needs in Catholic schools: A report of practices. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *10*(4), 473-489. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1004062013

Every Student Succeeds Act. (2015). Pub. L. No. 114-95, S. 1177, 114th Congress.

Faggella-Luby, M., & Bonfiglio, C. (2020). A framework for all: Building capacity for service delivery in Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education, 23*(2), 84-106. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2302082020

Faggella-Luby, M. N., Drew, S. V., & Schumaker, J. B. (2015). Not such a simple story: Contradictory evidence from a review of story structure research for students at-risk. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *30*(2), 61-75. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12057

Faggella-Luby, M. N., & Engel, M. (2020). Why inclusion isn't coming, it is already here: Catholic schools and inclusive special education. *Journal of Catholic Education, 23*(2), 30-54. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2302042020

Faggella-Luby, M. N., Schumaker, J. S., & Deshler, D. D. (2007). Embedded learning strategy instruction: Story-structure pedagogy in heterogeneous secondary literature classes. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *30*(2), 131-147. https://doi.org/10.2307/30035547

Fletcher, J. (2010). Spillover effects of inclusion of classmates with emotional problems on test scores in early elementary school. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 29*(1), 69–83. http://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20479

Fox, S., Farrell, P., & Davis, P. (2004). Factors associated with the effective inclusion of primary-aged pupils with Down's syndrome. *British Journal of Special Education, 31*(4), 184–190. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.0952-3383.2004.00353.x

Francis. (2015a). *Address of his holiness Pope Francis to members of the Italian union of Catholic school teachers, managers, educators, and trainers.* http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco_20150314_uciim.html

Francis. (2015b). *Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace*. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html

Freeman, S. F. (1999). Parental perspectives on inclusion: Effects of autism and Down syndrome. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders, 29*(4), 297-305. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022159302571

Freeman, S. F. N., & Alkin, M. C. (2000). Academic and social attainments of children with mental retardation in general education and special education settings. *Remedial and Special Education, 21*(1), 3–26. http://doi.org/10.1177/074193250002100102

Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. (2006). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (4th ed.). Allyn and Bacon.

Gasser, L., Malti, T., & Buholzer, A. (2013). Children's moral judgments and moral emotions following exclusion of children with disabilities: Relations with inclusive education, age, and contact intensity. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, *34*(3), 948-958. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2012.11.017

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice.* Multicultural Education Series.

Gibson, M. A., & Hidalgo, N. (2009). Bridges to success in high school for migrant youth. *Teachers College Record*, *111*(3), 683–711. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279651147

Gilmore, L., Campbell, J., & Cuskelly, M. (2003). Developmental expectations, personality stereotypes, and attitudes towards inclusive education: Community and teacher views of Down syndrome. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 50*(1), 65–76. http://doi.org/10.1080/1034912032000053340

Goodman, J. I., Hazelkorn, M., Bucholz, J. L., Duffy, M. L., & Kitta, Y. (2011). Inclusion and graduation rates: What are the outcomes? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *21*(4), 241-252. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207310394449

Gottfried, M. A. (2014). Classmates with disabilities and students' noncognitive outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 36*(1), 20–43. http://doi.org/10.3102/0162373713493130

Greeley, A. M. (2002). *Catholic high schools and minority students*. Transaction.

Harris, K. R., Lane, K. L., Driscoll, S. A., Graham, S., Wilson, K., Sandmel, K., Brindle, M., & Schatschneider, C. (2012). Tier 1, teacher-implemented self-regulated strategy development for students with and without behavioral challenges. *Elementary School Journal, 113*(2), 160-191. https://doi.org/10.1086/667403

Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. SUNY Press.

Hehir, T., & Katzman, L. I. (2012). *Effective inclusive schools: Designing successful schoolwide programs*. Jossey-Bass.

Huchting, K. K., Cunningham, M. P., Aldana, U. S., & Ruiz, D. (2017). Communities of practice: A consortium of Catholic elementary schools' collaborative journey. *Journal of Catholic Education, 21*(1), 62-83. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2101042017

Hughes, J. (2006). Inclusive education for individuals with Down syndrome. *Down Syndrome News and Update, 6*(1), 1–3. http://doi.org/10.3104/practice.370

Hunt, P., & Farron-Davis, F. (1992). A preliminary investigation of IEP quality and content associated with placement in general education versus special education classes. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 17*(4), 247–253. http://doi.org/10.1177/154079699201700406

Hunt, T. C. (2000). Catholic schools: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. *Journal of Research on Christian Education, 14*(2), 161–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/10656210509484987

Hymes, D. (1982). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics* (pp. 35-71). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Idol, L. (2006). Toward inclusion of special education students in general education: A program evaluation of eight schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(2), 77-94. https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325060270020601

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendment of 1997, 20 U.S.C. §§1400-1487 (2000).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 (2004).

Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 379-400). Sage Publications.

John Paul II. (2000a). *Jubilee of the disabled.* http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20001203_jubildisabled.html

John Paul II. (2000b, December 3). *Homily for the jubilee of the disabled.* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2000/documents/hf_ jp-ii_hom_20001203Jubildisabled_en.html

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1981). The integration of the handicapped into the regular classroom: Effects of cooperative and individualistic instruction. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 6*(4), 344-353. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-476X(81)90017-5

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1982). The effects of cooperative and individualistic instruction on handicapped and nonhandicapped students. *Journal of Social Psychology, 118*(2), 257-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1982.9922805

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1984a). Building acceptance of difference between handicapped and nonhandicapped students: The effects of cooperative and individualistic instruction. *Journal of Social Psychology, 122*(2), 257-267. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1984.9713488

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1984b). Mainstreaming hearing-impaired students: The effect of effort in communicating on cooperation and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Psychology, 119*(1), 31-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1985.9712604

John XXIII. (1961). *Mater et magistra*. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html

John XXIII. (1963). *Pacem in terris*. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html

Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A., & Kaplan, I. (2007). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research, 49*(4), 365-382. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880701717222

Katz, J., & Mirenda, P. (2002). Including students with developmental disabilities in general education classrooms: Educational benefits. *International Journal of Special Education, 17*(2), 14-24.

Kauffman, J. M., Bantz, J., & McCullough, J. (2002). Separate and better: A special public school class of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Exceptionality, 10*(3), 149-170. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327035EX1003_1

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner*. Deakin University Press.

Kurth, J. A., Marks, S. U., & Bartz, J. (2017). Educating students in inclusive classrooms. In M. L. Wehmeyer & K. A. Shogren (Eds.), *Handbook of research based practices for educating students with intellectual disability* (pp. 274-295). Routledge.

Landrum, T. J., Tankersley, M., & Kauffman, J. M. (2003). What is special about special education for students with emotional or behavioral disorders? *Journal of Special Education, 37*(3), 148-156. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ785941). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ785941.pdf

Lawrence-Brown, D., & Muschaweck, K. S. (2013). Getting started with collaborative teamwork for inclusion. *Journal of Catholic Education, 8*(2), 146-161. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0802022013

Leo XIII. (1891). *Rerum novarurn*. In M. Walsh & B. Davies (Eds.), *Proclaiming justice and peace* (pp. 15-40). Twenty-Third Publications. http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html

Lew, M., Mesch, D., Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1986). Components of cooperative learning: Effects of collaborative skills and academic group contingencies on achievement and mainstreaming. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11*(3), 229-239. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-476X(86)90019-6

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lipsky, D. K., & Gartner, A. (1997). *Inclusion and school reform: Transforming America's classrooms*. Brooks.

Louie, V., & Holdaway, J. (2009). Catholic schools and immigrant students: A new generation. *Teachers College Record, 111*(3), 783-816. https://www.tcrecord.org

Maras, P., & Brown, R. (1996). Effects of contact on children's attitudes toward disability: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26*(23), 2113-2134. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1996.tb01790.x

Maras, P., & Brown, R. (2000). Effects of different forms of school contact on children's attitudes toward disabled and non-disabled peers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 70*, 337-351. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709900158164

Martin, S., & Litton, E. F. (2004). *Equity, advocacy and diversity: New directions for Catholic schools*. National Catholic Educational Association.

Mayeroff, M. (1990). *On caring*. Harper Perennial.

McLellan, J. A. (2000). Rise, fall, and reasons why: U.S. Catholic elementary education, 1940-1995. In J. Youniss & J. J. Convey (Eds.), *Catholic schools at the crossroads: Survival and transformation* (pp. 17-32). Teachers College Press.

Moreau, C., Trussell, J., & Bajos, N. (2006). The determinants and circumstances of use of emergency contraceptive pills in France in the context of direct pharmacy access. *Contraception, 74*(6), 476-482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.contraception.2006.07.008

McDonald, D. (2014). Demographic shifts impacting Catholic school education. In G. Cattaro & C. Russo (Eds.), *Gravissimum educationis: Golden opportunities in American Catholic education 50 years after Vatican II* (pp. 63-76). Rowman and Littlefield.

McGreevy, J. T. (2003). *Catholicism and American freedom: A history*. W.W. Norton.

McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of effective inclusive schools: Research and practice.* Routledge.

McMaster, K. L., Kung, S.-H., Han, I., & Cao, M. (2008). Peer-assisted learning strategies: A "tier 1" approach to promoting English learners' response to intervention. *Exceptional Children, 74*(2), 194-214. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290807400204

Menzies, H., & Falvey, M. A. (2008). Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education. In T. Jimenez & V. Graf (Eds.), *Education for all: Critical issues in the education of children and youth with disabilities* (pp. 71-99). Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis.* Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2002). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (10th ed.). Pearson.

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Sage Publications.

National Catholic Education Association. (2018). *U.S. Catholic elementary and secondary schools 2018-2019*. Author.

National Catholic Partnership on Disability. (2018). *Affirmation of pastoral statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on persons with disabilities.* https://ncpd.org/affirmation

National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *The condition of education 2018* (NCES 2018-144). U.S. Department of Education.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1973). *To teach as Jesus did: A pastoral message on education.* U.S. Catholic Conference.

National Down Syndrome Society. (2001). About Down syndrome. https://www.NDSS.com

New King James Version. (n.d.). Bible hub. https://biblehub.com/matthew/

Noddings, N. (2016). Moral life and education. *Action in Teacher Education, 38*(3), 212–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2016.1194783

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice.* Sage Publications.

Office of Special Education Programs. (2015). *Policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education.

Osgood, R. L. (2005). *The history of inclusion in the United States.* Gallaudet University Press.

Osgood, R. L. (2008). *The history of special education: A struggle for equality in American public schools.* Praeger Publishers.

Oswald, M., & Swart, E. (2011). Addressing South African pre-service teachers' sentiments, attitudes and concerns regarding inclusive education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 58*(4), 389–403. http://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2011.626665

Ouchi, W. G. (2008). *Making schools work*. Simon & Schuster.

Ozar, L. A., & Weitzel-O'Neill, P. (2012). *National standards and benchmarks for effective Catholic elementary and secondary schools.* https://www.catholicschoolstandards.org/images/docs/standards/Catholic-School-Standards-English.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation methods.* Sage Publishing.

Paul VI. (1965a). *Gaudium et spes.* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

Paul VI. (1965b). *Gravissimum educationis.* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html

Paul VI. (1971). *Octogesima adveniens: Apostolic letter of Pope Paul VI.* http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters

Peltier, G. (1997). The effect of inclusion on non-disabled children: A review of the research. *Contemporary Education, 68*(4), 234.

Perner, D., & Porter, G. L. (1998). Creating inclusive schools: Changing roles and strategies. In A. Hilton & R. Ringlabem (Eds.), *Best and promising practice development disabilities* (pp. 317-330). Pro-ed.

Pierce v. Society of Sisters. 268 U.S. 510 (1925).

Powell, M. (2004). Catholic high schools: Can inclusion work without significant publicly-funded resources? *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry & Practice, 8*(1), 86-106. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0801082013

Preimesberger, J. (2000). *Historical perspective on the implementation of inclusive education in selected schools in the Diocese of San Diego* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of San Diego, CA.

Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2007). *User's guide to qualitative methods.* Sage.

Riordan, C. (2000). Trends in student demography in Catholic secondary schools, 1972-1992. In J. Youniss & J. J. Convey (Eds.), *Catholic schools at the crossroads: Survival and transformation* (pp. 33-54). Teachers College Press.

Roach, V. (1992). *Winners all: A call for inclusive schools*. National Association of State Boards of Education.

Ronning, J. A., & Nabuzoka, D. (1993). Promoting social interaction and status of children with intellectual disabilities in Zambia. *Journal of Special Education, 27*(3), 277-305. https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699302700302

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage.

Ryan, J. (2010). Establishing inclusion in a new school: The role of principal leadership. *Exceptionality Education International, 20*(2), 6-24. https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v20i2.7660

Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1977). *The Catholic school.* http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html

Saint-Laurent, L., Dionne, J., Giasson, J., Royer, É., Simard, C., & Piéarard, B. (1998). Academic achievement effects of an in-class service model on students with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 64*(2), 239–253. http://doi.org/10.1177/001440299806400207

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.

Salend, S. J., & Duhaney, L. M. G. (1999). The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities and their educators. *Remedial and Special Education, 20*(2), 114–126. http://doi.org/10.1177/074193259902000209

Scanlan, M. (2008a, March). *"I say yes and figure it out later": How epistemology impacts the inclusion and exclusion of traditionally marginalized students* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Scanlan, M. (2008b, March). *Encouraging and discouraging Catholic schools from serving students with special needs in inclusive environments* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Scanlan, M. (2008c). The grammar of Catholic schooling and radically "Catholic" schools. *Journal of Catholic Education, 12*(1), 25-54. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1201032013

Scanlan, M. (2009a). *All are welcome: Inclusive service delivery in Catholic schools.* Alliance for Catholic Education Press at the University of Notre Dame.

Scanlan, M. (2009b). Moral, legal, and functional dimensions of inclusive service delivery in Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education, 12*(4), 536-552. https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1204072013

Second Vatican Council. (1965). *Gaudium et spes*. In M. Walsh & B. Davies (Eds.), *Proclaiming justice and peace: Papal documents from Rerum Novarum through Centesimus Annus* (pp. 157-221). Twenty-Third Publications.

Setari, A. P., & Setari, R. R. (2016). Trends in Catholic school minority enrollment and higher education entrance over the recession. *Journal of Catholic Education, 19*(3), 4-19. http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903022016

Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (2008). Impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities. *Disability & Society, 23*(7), 773–785. http://doi.org/10.1080/09687590802469271

Shaughnessy, M. A. (2005). *The law and Catholic schools: A guide to legal issues for the third millennium* (2nd ed.). National Catholic Educational Association.

Shoho, A. R., & Katims, D. S. (1998). *Perceptions of alienation among special and general education teachers* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Sikkink, D. (2004). The hidden civic lessons of public and private schools. *Journal of Catholic Education, 7*(3), 339-365. http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol7/iss3/5

Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook.* Sage.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 435-454). Sage.

Szumski, G., & Karwowski, M. (2014). Psychosocial functioning and school achievement of children with mild intellectual disability in polish special, integrative, and mainstream schools. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 11*(2), 99–108. http://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12076

Trump, G., & Hange, J. (1996). *Teacher perceptions of and strategies for inclusion.* Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Turnbull, A. P., Turnbull, H. R., Erwin, E. J., Soodak, L. C., & Shogren, K. A. (2015). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: Positive outcomes through partnerships and trust.* Pearson.

Turner, S., Alborz, A., & Gayle, V. (2008). Predictors of academic attainments of young people with Down's syndrome. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 52*(5), 380–392. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2007.01038.x

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1998a). *Welcome and justice for persons with disabilities: A framework of access and inclusion.* https://ncpd.org/welcome-and-justice%C2%A0-persons-disabilities

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1998b). *Pastoral statement of the U.S. Catholic bishops on persons with disabilities.* http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/upload/Pastoral-Statement-of-U-S-Catholic-Bishops-on-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2002). *Catholic school children with disabilities*. Author.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2005a). *Renewing our commitment to Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the third millennium.* https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/upload/renewing-our-commitment-2005.pdf

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2005b). *National directory for catechesis.* Author.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2011). *November 2011 USCCB general assembly.* https://www.usccb.org/offices/general-secretariat/november-2011-usccb-general-assembly

U.S. Department of Education. (2018a). *40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018*. https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2018/parts-b-c/40th-arc-for-idea.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2018b). *Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA): Special education and disabilities services.* http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004.html

Vatican. (n.d.). *Code of canon law*. https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann793-821_en.html

Voltz, D. L., Brazil, N., & Ford, A. (2001). What matters most in inclusive education: A practical guide for moving forward. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 37*(1), 23-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/105345120103700105

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (Eds.). (2017). *Handbook of research based practices for educating students with intellectual disabilities.* Routledge.

Wolpert, G. (2001). What general educators have to say about successfully including students with Down syndrome in their classes. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 16*(1), 28–38. http://doi.org/10.1080/02568540109594972

Wong, D. K. P. (2008). Do contacts make a difference? The effects of mainstreaming on student attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 29*(1), 70-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2006.11.002

World Health Organization. (2011). *Chapter 7. Education.* https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/chapter7.pdf

Yell, M. L., Katsiyannis, A., & Shriner, J. G. (2006). The No Child Left Behind Act, adequate yearly progress, and students with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 55*(4), 32-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990603800405

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Sage.

Youniss, J., & Convey, J. J. (Eds.) (2000). *Catholic schools at the crossroads: Survival and transformation*. Teachers College Press.