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Examination of Exceptional Student Educators’ Personal Practical Theories and the Implications for Practice

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Examination of Exceptional Student Educators’ Personal Practical Theories and the Implications for Practice

by

Melissa Jewell Call

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership, School Counseling, and Sports Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing husband Ronny, who encouraged me every step of the way...even when I didn’t want to continue. You made so many sacrifices on my behalf.

I am forever grateful.

To my beautiful children Clark, Alex, and Abbie. I am so incredibly proud of you. Thank you for your support and understanding through this journey and for the events I missed due to classwork and writing.

I promise to make it up to you.

To my mother, Jewell: I did it! I know you are so proud. To my father, BJ: I miss you.

Thank you for supporting me, loving me unconditionally and teaching me the value of education.

I love you all.
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My participants Jackson, Patricia, Yazmine, and Kimberly deserve a special thank you. I could not have done it without you. You are role models for other ESE teachers and leaders and I greatly appreciate the time and honesty you put into this study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Dedication ................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgments ................................................................................... iv
List of Tables .......................................................................................... vii
List of Figures ........................................................................................ viii
Abstract .................................................................................................. ix

Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................... 1
  Background of the Study ....................................................................... 5
  Problem Statement .............................................................................. 8
  Research Questions ............................................................................. 9
  Study Design ......................................................................................... 9
  Significance of the Study ..................................................................... 10
  Delimitations of the Study .................................................................. 12
  Limitations of the Study ..................................................................... 12
  Organization of the Study .................................................................... 13
  Definition of Terms ............................................................................. 13

Chapter 2 ................................................................................................. 15
  The Construct of Worldviews ............................................................... 16
  An Overview of Reflective Practice ...................................................... 17
  Teacher Personal Practical Theories (PPTs) .......................................... 21
  Exceptional Student Educator Challenges ........................................... 25

Chapter Three: Methodology ................................................................. 31
  Introduction to the Methodology .......................................................... 31
  The Researcher ..................................................................................... 34
  Participants ............................................................................................ 43
  Risks/Benefits ...................................................................................... 45
  Data Collection ..................................................................................... 46
  Primary Data Collection ...................................................................... 47
  Semi-structured Interviews .................................................................. 48
Establishment of Trustworthiness ................................................................. 51
Ethics ............................................................................................................. 52
CHAPTER 4 .................................................................................................. 54
  Context of the Cases ................................................................................. 55
  Participants’ Theories .............................................................................. 55
CHAPTER 5 .................................................................................................. 107
  Theoretical Framework ........................................................................... 107
  Methodology ........................................................................................... 108
  Research Questions ................................................................................ 111
  Limitations of the Study ....................................................................... 115
References ................................................................................................. 119
Appendix A: Informed consent ................................................................. 128
  Explanation of Study ................................................................................ 128
  Risks and Discomforts .......................................................................... 129
  Benefits ................................................................................................... 129
  Confidentiality and Records .................................................................. 129
  Contact Information ................................................................................ 129
APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .................. 131
APPENDIX C: PPT WORKBOOK ............................................................... 134
APPENDIX D: GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................. 141
APPENDIX E: 2014-2015 ZONING PLAN, YAZMINE ............................ 142
Vita ............................................................................................................. 151
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Personal Practical Theories as Defined by the Site Coach.................................39
Table 2: Demographics of Participants.............................................................................44
Table 3: Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Jackson........................................57
Table 4: Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Yazmine........................................65
Table 5: Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Kimberly.......................................73
Table 6: Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Patricia........................................81
Table 7: Themes Across Participants.................................................................................90
Table 8: Comparison of Themes......................................................................................103
Table 9: Relationship of Themes......................................................................................104
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Cornett’s (1990a) Model for Analysis of the Impact of Teacher Personal Practical Theories on the Curricular and Instructional Decision</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Planning Phase Site Coach.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Interactive Phase Site Coach.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Reflective Phase Site Coach.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Planning Phase Jackson</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Interactive Phase Jackson</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Reflective Phase Jackson</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Planning Phase Yazmine</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Interactive Phase Yazmine</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Reflective Phase Yazmine</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Planning Phase Kimberly</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Interactive Phase Kimberly</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Reflective Phase Kimberly</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Planning Phase Patricia</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Interactive Phase Patricia</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Reflective Phase Patricia</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This study examined exceptional student educators’ (ESE) personal practical theories (PPTs) and how they impact complex decision-making when it comes to students with disabilities and their families. A case study methodology was selected to explore how four ESE teachers and leaders developed their PPTs as well as how they planned, interacted, and reflected upon decisions made during one workweek. The guiding questions of this study were: what are the PPTs of ESE leaders and teachers, what factors influence the development of PPTs, and how do PPTs impact special educators’ work with students with disabilities? To address these questions, four participants were selected based on their role within the district, their experiences working with students with disabilities, and their reputation for being high quality educators. Data were collected using a PPT workbook as well as in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The results of this study included five PPTs for each participant and eight common themes. These themes included: care for students and families, safety of students, administration and teacher professional development, ensuring high expectations for students, personal and professional advocacy, mentoring and collaboration, reflection and problem solving, and problems with inclusion. These results are presented in this dissertation in support of an argument for the need for increased pre-service and in-service for ESE educators, increased professional development for administrators, and increased training for inclusion teachers working with students with disabilities. Engaging in a practice of exploring and refining teacher and leader beliefs and assumptions using the PPT process may increase the reflective practice of teachers and perhaps result in a more appropriate form of evaluation for educators.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this study is to examine exceptional student educators’ (ESE) personal practical theories and how they manifest in practice. The researcher will look at ESE teachers through different lenses including the development of their perceptions and theories, teacher decision-making, and how and if they view their role in providing services for families. Teachers bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to classroom practice through their experiences, perceptions, and theories. A wide range of experiences, perceptions, and theories influence and shape their practices, impacting their work with students. Personal practical theories (PPT) are based on teaching experiences such as curriculum design and implementation, as well as non-teaching personal experiences and life events. An individual’s PPTs are influenced by formal theory, teaching experience, and key people who have an influence on a teacher’s life. PPTs should be reflected upon, refined, and are continually evolving based on the teacher’s experiences (Cornett, 2001). “Effective teaching practice is based upon experiential knowledge. Teachers learn to make curriculum decisions primarily through direct experience as both students and teachers” (Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992, p. 15). A model that describes this construct in operation is described in chapter two. Understanding the PPTs of ESE teachers and leaders may lead to improved educator training, high quality professional development, provision of services for students and families, and increased support for inclusion.

Decision-making in an ESE setting is complex and involves looking at disabilities from several perspectives (Truscott, Meyers, Meyers, Gelzheiser, & Grout, 2004). The social constructs of disability may include the availability of basic resources, high-risk conditions such as abuse and neglect, and poverty. Several researchers have looked at special education from a
social justice perspective. Romanowski and Oldenski (1998) stated the importance of teacher reflective practice as it relates to social justice. “Teachers need to develop an awareness of themselves as moral agents in relationship to the curriculum and students; that awareness needs to include the realization that their own teaching has moral and ethical dimensions” (p. 111). Furthermore, Slote (2009) explained ethics of care as how we are truly connected with others; our human moral thinking that works toward justice, autonomy, and individual rights. In what she describes as “natural” care, Noddings (2012) suggested that, as humans, we have the responsibility to care for one another. Natural care is the spontaneous response to another person’s difficulties. In contrast, Noddings described the ethics of care as having to be decided, called upon, or considered. She indicated that ethical decisions must be made in order for natural caring to take place. Difficult situations arise where we must ask ourselves what an individual needs: “Am I competent to provide this help? What is best for the individual? Will I sacrifice too much of myself if I care? And why should I respond?” (Noddings, 2012, p. 233). The fundamental principal of ethical caring is to always work toward establishing, sustaining, and improving caring relationships. The current study examined the perceptions of ESE educators through personal theorizing and it’s connection to decision making.

An examination of teachers’ perspectives on their own personal beliefs and theories of how they help in the provision of care and services to students and families is critical. Research is clear that teacher beliefs impact their judgment and decision-making in the classroom, affecting their students’ opportunities to learn (Chant, 2002; Chant et al., 2004; Clandinin, 1986; Cornett, 1990a, 1990b; McCutcheon, 1992; Pajares, 1992, 1993; Pape, 1992; Ross, 1992; Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992 as cited by Levin & He, 2008).
Historically, individuals with disabilities have been disregarded and marginalized when it comes to education. Poor outcomes and low expectations for student success have lead to several laws designed to improve the educational opportunities for these students. Beginning with compulsory education laws in the 1800’s, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, and further to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, students with disabilities now have the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). However, these laws did not necessarily guarantee fair and equal treatment for this population of children. Although IDEA requires students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, often times there is a significant disparity between “what IDEA requires and what local school systems will actually tolerate” (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004, idea.ed.gov, 2004).

Many advocacy and special interest coalitions such as The National Association for Retarded Citizens and The Council for Exceptional Children fought for the development of the services available to students today (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Although attitudes toward children with disabilities have changed positively over the years, people continue to have negative perceptions that impact their actions regarding the treatment and care of students with disabilities. Rodriguez, Saldana, and Moreno (2012) found that positive teacher attitudes toward children with disabilities are a critical factor in their success. The authors found that experiences, training, and perceptions of support are the variables most influencing teacher attitudes when working with students with significant disabilities.

Perceptions and worldviews regarding students with disabilities impact how students are treated and how services are provided. ESE teachers’ theories and practices have perhaps an
even greater impact on students and families because of the characteristics of the students, which may include communication and social skills deficits, behavioral issues, and functional living and self-advocacy needs. Like regular education students, ESE students must be prepared to live full, productive lives. They need the tools to learn to self-advocate, develop independence, and help others understand that they also represent an important part of society. The needs of families of children with disabilities are as varied as the disabilities themselves. Parents must be aware of mental health, income and funding, transportation, and employment assistance programs that are offered. This is especially important for those families facing multiple risks (Peterson, Mayer, Summers, & Luze, 2010). In a 2002 study by Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, researchers found that of 4,151 school districts serving over 24 million students, students identified as having learning disabilities were disproportionately male, came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and a majority were from minority groups (as cited in Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Through reflective practice, teachers may learn more about their own role in serving these students with dignity and respect. Assumptions may be discarded regarding the cause of students’ behaviors and needs, and focus shifts to extending the care to ESE students as they would to students in regular education classes.

ESE teachers’ perceptions of their personal practical theories and how they impact practice is critical to understanding how decisions are made and how teachers advocate for students and their families. ESE teachers often spend several years working with the same student in a self-contained setting. This extended length of teaching time allows for clear goals for learning to be developed, strong relationships to form, and behavioral and academic interventions to be implemented for longer periods of time. In 1976-1977 over three million
students with disabilities were attending and receiving services through America’s school systems. This number rose to over six million in the 2011-2012 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Teachers and administrators have to be aware of their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings regarding students and how best to serve them, particularly with the rise in the number of students with disabilities served in public school settings. While much research has been conducted in the area of teacher reflective practices, there is very little research regarding the practices of ESE teachers and how they perceive their role in working with families of students with disabilities. Studies have been conducted in the area of teacher personal, practical theorizing, however PPT research specifically focusing on teachers working with students with disabilities is scarce.

Background of the Study

Throughout history persons with disabilities have been isolated, excluded, institutionalized, and even euthanized. This changed with the passage of Public Law 94-142 The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (now known as IDEA). Historically legislation allowed schools to refuse educational services to students considered “uneducable” (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). The federal government provided grants for asylums and institutions for the deaf and blind in the mid 1800’s. It wasn’t until the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that federal efforts went into subsidizing services for public elementary and secondary schools. While the ESEA did not provide direct grants for students with disabilities, PL 89-131 of that act allowed for Title I monies to be used to benefit state-supported schools serving handicapped children (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). A 1971 Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania case set the stage for a free public education for children who had previously been excluded from public schools. The state argued that children with profound disabilities could not benefit from an education. However, the court ruled that all “mentally retarded” children would benefit from public education and training including becoming self-sufficient and achieving some degree of self-care (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971; Weintraub, 2005). Mills v. Board of Education was a landmark case for students with disabilities. The court ruled that districts were prohibited from determining that inadequate funding allowed them to exclude children with disabilities from receiving equal education and services. Both cases ended exclusion, mandated special education services, and established parental rights to challenge decisions regarding their child’s education (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972; Weber, 2009).

As increasing numbers of children are identified with a variety of disabilities, the need for well-prepared, “highly qualified” teachers and supportive administrators also increases. Their decision-making with regards to service provision for students with disabilities will be critical to ensuring a high-quality education for all students. The 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in their least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students ages 3-21 with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012, idea.ed.gov, 2004). This legislation has been amended many times and currently provides support for children with disabilities through six major principles: zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, individualized education program, least restrictive environment, due process, and parental participation (National Research Council, 2001). President George W. Bush reauthorized IDEA in 2004 to increase alignment with the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act.
The new regulations included new definitions for such ideas as “highly qualified,” “core academic subjects,” “scientifically based research,” and “limited English proficiency.” Additionally, the law addressed funding issues, accountability, special educator requirements, alternative assessments, and eligibility and staffing (idea.ed.gov). Although the passage of federal laws has certainly helped children with disabilities access public education, it does not guarantee that the laws will be implemented and carried out faithfully. The federal government is currently attempting to replace NCLB with a reauthorization proposal for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that will give more power to local and state decision makers. The new law will be designed to grant administrators and school leaders authority to design and implement their own accountability systems to ensure all students, including those with disabilities, receive tailored instruction to meet their individual needs (whitehouse.gov, 2015).

Perceptions and attitudes develop over a lifetime and impact actions. Many factors influence the development of these perceptions and attitudes. Cornett, Joyner, Kelly, and Thayer (2012) described the importance of educational leaders and teachers, now more than ever, to engage in structured self reflection in order to be “more purposeful, effective, and in some cases more efficient.” (p. 1). This reflection is accomplished by looking closely at the values and beliefs that one holds dear and whether these values and beliefs align with the actions of implementing the curriculum and instruction. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) stressed the value of teachers’ using an experiential and dialogic process to question and/or confirm their personal theories. Through this thorough examination, a way of thinking is developed that helps align practices and actions with theories. The Naturalistic Leadership Decision-Making Model developed by Cornett (1990a) helps teachers analyze their personal practical theories and how
they impact curricular decisions and instructional practices. The model looks at PPTs in relation to vision, planning, interaction, reflection, and the external influences impacting teacher decision-making.

Life changing decisions are made regarding services, learning goals, transitions, respite care, and post-school living. ESE teachers need to constantly reflect on their PPTs in order to ensure ethical practice in helping students and families make these decisions.

Problem Statement

Ferraro (2000) and Harris (1998) both described the value of reflective practice in teaching as leading teachers to a greater appreciation of their own style and increased teaching success and as well as continuous professional growth and more effective teaching. Although much research has been conducted on teacher reflective practice, it is imperative to look at the PPTs and reflective practices of teachers specifically working with students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are a particularly vulnerable group. It is imperative for teachers and leaders to help ensure educational opportunities are expanded, employment opportunities are increased, health care is strengthened, and civil rights are promoted (whitehouse.gov, 2015). Understanding ESE teachers’ PPTs is a critical strategy to help improve teaching, realize challenges facing teachers, and why decisions are made. Increasing diagnoses of children with disabilities requires teachers to critically reflect on their personal theories and whether these align with their current practices. What we know about teaching in general is even more essential when focusing on students with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this current study is to explore the relationship between ESE leader and
educator’s actions as evidenced by their Personal Practical Theories (PPTs).

**Research Questions**

The current study is a purposive sample of ESE teachers and leaders to explore the following questions:

1. What are the PPTs of ESE educators?
   a) Teachers
   b) Leaders

2. What factors influence the development of PPTs?
   a) How do training, experience, and formal theory factor into the development of PPTs?
   b) How do the ESE leaders and teachers’ perceptions of support within the district and school influence their PPTs?

3. Has a change in role/responsibilities within the district impacted PPTs?

4. How do PPTs impact special educators’ work with students with disabilities?

5. How does reflective practice help in the refinement of ESE teachers PPTs?

**Study Design**

In this qualitative study the researcher guided four participants individually through the Personal Practical Theory process as a primary data collection tool. The researcher’s PPTs were also used as data for this study. Semi-structured interviews and field notes were used to collect
additional data. A comparative case study approach helped explore the perspectives of the ESE teachers and leaders through an assortment of lenses, which allowed several different facets of the participants’ perspectives, knowledge, and experiences to be understood. Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) recommended using a case study approach when the researcher seeks to recognize the importance and value of the human creation of meaning. This constructivist paradigm focuses on developing a greater understanding of the participants through close cooperation between the participants and researcher, allowing the participants to share their stories, their views of reality, and reasons for their actions (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

*Significance of the Study*

This study is significant because ESE teachers and leaders play a major role in helping families receive services, set learning goals, and monitor progress of students with disabilities. ESE teachers’ attitudes and worldviews regarding their students can work to help combat social discrimination facing students with disabilities. Society’s treatment of persons with disabilities has historically been mixed; study findings will be used to help ESE teachers and leaders ensure fair and equitable treatment of their students.

There is no unified worldview of disabilities and those who have them. The world’s societal views appear to be somewhat schizophrenic with regard to persons with disabilities. On the one hand, some societies in an attempt to assist persons with disabilities attain some measure of freedom have taken a somewhat paternalistic approach. While well meaning, this approach often subjects the person with a disability to unwanted sympathy and pity. Too frequently, the paternalistic approach
smothers the person with good intentions and stunts the person’s emotional and psychological growth. On the other hand, some societies have tended to view persons with disabilities as expendable humans; persons of little societal value, to be segregated and separated from the mainstream of society and yes, in some cases, persons to be exterminated (Bryan, 2009, p. 13-14).

ESE teachers play a major role in ensuring students with disabilities have and receive access to the general education curriculum and special education services based on their individualized learning needs. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates that students with disabilities be included in the school’s accountability system. Although the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of students with disabilities is reported separately from regular education students, the law states “students with disabilities will achieve at the same levels as other students” and holds teachers and schools accountable for their progress (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004, p. 153). School administrators have the difficult task of balancing the individual needs of students with disabilities with the academic achievement of the school as a whole (Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2012). Praisner (2003) reported administrators’ attitudes and perceptions toward special education students and inclusive practices are impacted by prior experiences, training and professional development, and the type of disability of the students being served. Balancing individual interests of students while ensuring federal, state, and local policies are met requires principals and administrators to examine their leadership practices, making certain ethical and moral decision-making is promoted.
While much research has been done on the importance of reflective practice in education, no research has been conducted looking at the reflective practices and PPTs of ESE educators. The development and refinement of PPTs is critical to an ESE teacher’s ability to make ethical decisions regarding students and their families, help eliminate social discrimination, and ensure appropriate learning is taking place. This study contributes to teacher and administrator practice in making decisions for students with disabilities and advocating for families.

Delimitations of the Study

The researcher narrows the scope of this research by focusing on ESE teachers and administrators and their personal practical theories. The researcher focuses only on ESE teachers because of the direct and immediate impact they have on the families. The sample was limited to teachers and administrators within the Caroline County School District.

Limitations of the Study

The results of the study will not be generalizable to the population of educators as a whole because the focus will be on the PPTs of special education teachers and administrators. Additionally, the study is not generalizable to special education teachers or leaders. The study utilized established credibility techniques in part to promote transferability to other settings, the specifics of which will be discussed in chapter three. There are general limitations associated with the qualitative nature of the study. The study relied on participants’ reflections and perceptions leaving room for subjectivity and researcher bias. Using a variety of data collection methods including observations, interviews, and the collection of PPT documents as well as multiple credibility techniques, helped mitigate the limitations associated with the approach for data collection and analysis.
Organization of the Study

This study was organized into three chapters: introduction, review of the literature, and methodology. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the research and its importance to education. It provides the background to the study, problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, and delimitations. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to the development of worldviews and how they impact practice, reflective practice, the development of personal practical theories, and the challenges facing ESE students and teachers. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology. A description of the research design, participants, data sources, and data collection and analysis are also presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reviews the research questions and identifies the personal practical theories of two teachers and two district level support specialists as well as the PPTs of the researcher. Themes across the study and relationships among themes are defined and presented in tables. Chapter 5 provides a review of the theoretical framework and methodology and presents the findings and recommendations for future research. A discussion as well as the limitations of the study is also presented in chapter 5.

Definition of Terms

Personal Practical Theories: Systematic theories and beliefs held by teachers and leaders based on personal non-teaching experiences and practical experiences that come from the development and implementation of curriculum and instruction as well as from leadership decision-making (Cornett, 1990a; Cornett & Johnson, 2015).

Exceptional Student Education (ESE): Educational services and programs for children with special learning needs and varying exceptionalities. This may include gifted students or students
with disabilities. Services may include specially designed curriculum and instruction to meet the unique learning needs of special students (Florida Department of Education, 2011).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Legislation initiated by President George W. Bush and passed in 2001 by Congress that was designed to (a) ensure education systems were held accountable for student achievement; (b) improve academic outcomes of students with disabilities and the economically disadvantaged; (c) maintain highly qualified teachers and principals; (d) provide language instruction for limited English proficient students; (e) provide parents with school choice and create more competitive education programs and; (f) ensure all children read at grade level (US Department of Education, 2004).

Communication and Social Skills (CSS) Setting: Caroline County School District provide services to students with autism and related disabilities in low-incidence settings where ESE teachers focus on increasing communication and social skills for more independent living.

Access Points: Revised Sunshine State Standards specifically developed for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Access points reflect the intent of the standards, providing complexity at three different levels: participatory, supportive, and independent.
CHAPTER 2

Introduction to the Literature

A goal of America’s public school system is to provide high quality education to all students, including those with disabilities. Educators must critically examine their school’s vision, mission, and policies, along with the provisions of support for families to accomplish this goal. It is especially critical to examine the supports in place for students with disabilities.

Public Law 94-142 (1975), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act provided a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students ages 3-21 with disabilities. The Act has been reinforced through subsequent reauthorizations many times, including the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and IDEA 2005 which included a “highly qualified” mandate originally introduced by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Categories of eligibility under IDEA include, but are not limited to Autism Spectrum Disorder, blindness, deafness, emotional/behavioral disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disabilities, speech and/or language impairments, and traumatic brain injuries (Smith, 2005, idea.gov, 2001). The number of students in 2012-2013 receiving special education services was 6.4 million (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). The individualized needs of students with disabilities and families vary greatly and continually change, therefore receiving the necessary services is critical for positive outcomes.

Given the breadth of information available on this topic, this chapter is divided into four sections. Section one will provide a discussion of the development of worldviews and perceptions and how they influence action. Section two will review the literature regarding
teacher reflective practice and how it impacts decision making in the school setting. Section three will describe teacher personal practical theorizing, focusing on the process and how it effects classroom practice and student outcomes. Finally, the researcher will address the specific needs and challenges facing exceptional student educators and how personal theorizing may help align beliefs and actions, ensuring ethical practices.

The Construct of Worldviews

Haggland (1999) described worldviews as, “…social representations that are constructed, transmitted, confirmed, and reconstructed in social interactions, and they mediate social action” (p. 195). The author also suggested that individuals are only somewhat conscious of their worldviews, having developed them early in life. It is imperative to understand how worldviews and perceptions are developed and how these ideas impact decision-making as worldviews are developed early on and impact a response to situations and people. Valk, Belding, Crumpton, Harter, & Reams (2011) stated worldviews are critical in serving a function in society. Our worldviews encompass deeply embedded beliefs regarding our own realities. These beliefs impact our decision-making and influence how we think and act. Hitlin and Salisbury (2013) further suggested that not only do demographic influences such as race, class and gender influence worldviews, but social experiences such as political views, academic motivation, need for cognition, openness to diversity, psychological well being, and spirituality establish core orientations. Worldviews help individuals set priorities, determine right and wrong, and develop awareness of others and themselves. Walsh and Middleton (1984) argued that worldviews answer the questions of who we are, where we are, why we are suffering, and what is the remedy, focusing on a description of humanness and equality among humans (as cited by Jensen,
Worldviews, shaped by family, community and culture, change over time and are influenced by personal experiences, generational differences, and society. Critically understanding one’s own worldview may help achieve balance and mindfulness of the perspectives of others.

Janesick’s (1977) 7-month ethnographic field study of a classroom teacher defined teacher perspective as “a reflective, socially derived interpretation of experience that serves as a basis for subsequent action” (p. 287, cited by Clark & Peterson, 1986). Literature suggests that the teacher’s perspective combines interpretations, beliefs, behaviors, and intentions that continually interact and are influenced by social exchanges. The framework helps teachers make sense of their experiences and act rationally in their decision-making. During the teaching process, worldviews and perspectives influence teachers. While some may have a positive influence in testing beliefs and theories, other perspectives can perpetuate biases making educators resistant to alternative points of view or actions (Wai, 2004).

An Overview of Reflective Practice

Successful educators are open to diverse perspectives and base decisions on multiple sources of information, developing instruction that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners (Risco, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002). Schwab (1969) recommended teachers rely on reflective practice to better understand the connection between beliefs and actions (cited by Chant, Heafner, and Bennett, 2004). A reflective practitioner “spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation” when facing a challenge (Schon, 1983, p. 132). The reflective practitioner may acquire a deeper understanding of the problem itself through the attempt to change and/or solve a problematic situation. Schon described the process as an experiment in
which the practitioner reframes the problem, considers the uniqueness of the situation, attempts to apply familiar theories or techniques, inquires as to possible solutions, and acts. However, the reflective process is continual and cyclical. Schon suggested individuals should have the capacity to relate new and unfamiliar situations to previous experiences, using past knowledge to shed light on new and unique situations.

Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) described the importance of reflective thinking as leading to better practice, however both argued the process may be complex and difficult, leading to conflict, doubt, and hesitation, but ultimately shedding light on the facts. Dewey stated:

In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another. (p. 9).

Although reflective practice has its challenges, both Dewey and Schon asserted that engaging in systematic self-reflection that is active and purposeful leads to more thoughtful and well-reasoned decision-making. The challenge to teachers is to develop a mindful awareness of their beliefs, values, attitudes, and prejudices and how they influence their practice. Educators should think of themselves as “moral agents” in connection to the curriculum and students, understanding that the act of teaching involves moral and ethical dilemmas. Therefore, teachers must critically reflect on how they make decisions that impact student outcomes (Romanowski & Oldenski, 1998, Van Manen, 1977).
Teacher reflective practice is perhaps even more difficult with current accountability standards, state-mandated curriculum, and district policies. The demands of data collection to provide evidence that IEP goals are met, ensuring appropriate accommodations are given to students, and keeping up with the ever-changing district mandated curriculum are just a few of the challenges facing ESE teachers and leaders daily. Further, leaders must maintain detailed records regarding students being served in different educational settings, review and understand eligibility requirements, adhere to due process requirements, and educate themselves on the federal and state policies regarding special education. Liston and Zeichner (1990) recommended teachers reflect inward at their own practice and outward at the social context in which they are situated. Four levels of reflection were described as factual (routines and procedures in the classroom), procedural (evaluation of student outcomes), justificatory (rationales for teaching), and critical (teaching as it impacts social justice) (Liston and Zeichner, 1990).

This is imperative for teachers working with students in underrepresented populations, including those with disabilities because of the intense needs of the students and families. Teachers working with students with disabilities have significantly different routines and procedures, including the need for constant adult supervision for safety, increased use of visual supports and assistive technology devices, monitoring of academic and behavioral interventions, and classroom safety considerations. Further, the procedures for ESE classrooms include the student working with several different service providers throughout the day, student-focused paraprofessionals, and time for therapies. Data collection is also a factor for ESE teachers, as they are required to comply with IEP goals, accommodations, modifications, and appropriate assessments. Rationales for teaching vary greatly as the curriculum is differentiated
considerably for each student according to his/her IEPs and individual needs. Many ESE teachers have students in several different grade levels as well as different educational standards in one classroom. Finally, teachers in ESE find themselves working with a historically marginalized group of students. They must ensure the students’ rights are protected by knowing and following the requirements for due process, eligibility, least restrictive environment, and inclusion opportunities.

Categories of students receiving services, as defined by the IDEA, are broad and include such disabilities as Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech and Language Impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disabilities, and Orthopedic Impairments. Several studies have documented challenges facing special education teachers and how these challenges impact attitudes in working with children with disabilities (Rodriguez, Saldana, & Moreno, 2012, Billingsley, 2004, Zaretsky, Moreau, Faircloth, 2008). The need of teachers and leaders for intensive and specific professional development, special education mentors, district support, knowledge of interventions, and a strong value placed on connectedness and collaboration was found to be a critical piece of the ESE puzzle. Frick, Faircloth, and Little (2012) suggested administrators face internal tension when attempting to balance the individual interest of students with disabilities with the collective interest of the student body. While NCLB focuses on accountability and the growth of the school as a whole, IDEA’s focus is on individual rights of students to be in their least restrictive environment. This dichotomy often puts principals in a battle between equality versus equity.

Skrtic and Ware (1992) agreed that the current organizational structure of public schools works against teacher reflective practice. Historically, schools have functioned as machine
bureaucracies, limiting collaboration and socialization. Efforts are currently underway to change this structure to focus more on professional learning communities and teacher collaboration. The authors acknowledged that special education programs were created in response to environmental demands for change, decoupling the school units from one another. This led to an increase in barriers to teacher theorizing. The researchers suggested movement toward adhocracy to enhance collaboration, where diversity is viewed as a strength and a valuable source of innovation, helping teachers to focus on educational equity. However, aligning professional and personal codes of ethics with state mandates and competing values when making critical decisions in special education may cause conflict and moral dissonance (Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2007).

Teacher Personal Practical Theories (PPTs)

Elbaz (1983) suggested that society acknowledge the existence of a teacher’s practical and experiential knowledge shaped by values and purpose. “Practical knowledge”, originally described by Elbaz, included situation, personal, experiential, social, and theoretical sources that come together to define teachers’ practical knowledge. Clark and Peterson (1986) reviewed literature on teacher thought processes and summarized teacher thinking as substantially influencing teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Teachers were described as thoughtful professionals who go through the cognitively demanding and complex process of reflection in order to improve in their profession. Perry’s theory of cognitive and ethical development (1968, 1981) states that individuals develop a set of assumptions through which they filter their actions. These structures are “sequential, hierarchical, and recursive in nature, progressing from relatively simple to complex understandings” (pg. 68) and shape their motives for engaging with
individuals or events (Pape, 1992).

Jackson (1968) conducted one of the first studies that looked at the mental constructs and cognitive processes underlying teacher behaviors. The full complexity of teaching was described and attention called to the importance of teacher thinking and planning (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Since then, educational researchers and practitioners have worked to understand the mental lives of teachers and understand how and why the actions of teachers take on certain forms and functions. Clark and Peterson (1986) looked at the history of research on teacher thinking and developed a model of teacher thought and action. The model depicts unobservable teacher thought processes such as planning, interactive thoughts and choices, and teacher theories and beliefs. Likewise, it also takes teacher actions and their observable effects including teacher and student classroom behavior and student achievement into consideration. The model also considers constraints and opportunities impacting the teaching process. These may include the physical setting, community, administration, and/or curriculum decisions. All of these domains are intertwined and influence one another, therefore they must be examined in relation to one another before the complicated process of teacher thinking can be understood (Clark and Peterson, 1986).

Ross, Cornett, and McCutcheon (1992) investigated teacher thinking and cognition, focusing on three major areas: teachers’ planning thoughts, interactive thoughts and decisions, and theories and beliefs. Cornett (1987) defined personal practical theories (PPTs) as teachers’ beliefs or theories, which are based on personal and practical experiences in and out of the classroom. Cornett (1990a) stated that teachers’ PPTs continually change and progress as personal and practical experiences change and are impacted by external factors such as
legislation, economics, administrators, and media (p. 189) (Figure 1). The concept behind this model is that teachers’ decisions regarding curriculum and implementation are mutually influenced by their personal practical theories (E), external factors (F), as well as the planning (B), interactive (C), and reflective (D) phases of teaching. This model is founded on tenets that teaching is active and decision-making is practical and deliberative. Influenced by PPTs, teachers ultimately are committed and responsible professionals. Reflexivity can increase awareness and improve practice, and action research can encourage ongoing reflection (Cornett, 1990a).
PPTs impact teacher decision making at the planning, teaching, and reflective phases of teaching (Chant, 2002; Clandinin, 1986; Cornett, 1990a; Cornett, et al, 1990; Pape 1992 as cited by He & Levin, 2008). Fairbanks, Duffy, Faircloth, He, Levin, Rohr, and Stein (2010) acknowledged some teachers might be able to respond to student needs and situations better than other teachers. The researchers suggested this is due to the process of personal theorizing, allowing teachers to make their beliefs and values explicit and accessible for reflection and examination. This allows teachers to investigate how and if they enact their beliefs, increase their knowledge of their practice, and become more effective.

Limited research exists on administrator thinking and theorizing. However, Reitzug and Cornett (1990) describe the importance of training administrators to critically reflect on their practice. The authors described a Danforth scholar training program where future administrators developed their personal practical theories, examined the relationships between and among theories regarding leadership, and engaged in an administrative internship where they reflected upon the alignment between actions and beliefs. A more recent study by Cornett and Johnson (2015) shed light on the need for the reflexive process to be strengthened. In a five-year study, Cornett and Johnson investigated the theorizing and decision-making of a superintendent in a high performing school district. The superintendent, Joyner, identified six core PPTs and how they guided his decision-making as he interacted with personnel throughout the district. Joyner listed servant leadership as a top PPT. The authors sought to determine what district leaders viewed as the guiding principles of their superintendent by looking at the essential skills and
dispositions of servant leadership. These skills and dispositions included listening, empathy, growth of people, and honesty/integrity. Thirty-three participants recognized these skills and dispositions in Joyner’s PPTs as they were evident in his practice. The authors stated, “The study has built upon our thinking that Joyner’s PPTs are deeply rooted in their foundational nature in the superintendent’s thinking and that they have been integrated into the theorizing of his team as well” (Cornett and Johnson, 2015, p. 24).

**Exceptional Student Educator Challenges**

Much research has been done regarding the current challenges facing ESE teachers and administrators (York & Reynolds, 1996; Kauffman, McGee & Brigham, 2004; Nichols, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2008; Weintraub, 2012). Both general and special educators struggle with setting realistic goals for students while encouraging them to be responsible and independent citizens. Perhaps the most common challenges highlighted in current literature are inclusion, ethical decision-making regarding services, and ESE teacher retention rates.

The Regular Education Initiative (REI) emerged in the 1980’s proposing the merger of special education and regular education into a unitary system and increasing the efforts and responsibilities of general education teachers to accommodate students with disabilities (York & Reynolds, 1996). The idea of inclusion was not specifically addressed in *A Nation at Risk* (1983), however in order to alleviate ESE teacher shortages, many administrators, without having a clear understanding of inclusion, developed a range of co-teaching models. This led to inadequate training, a sense of feeling overwhelmed, and students ultimately receiving fewer supports in both general and special education settings (Nichols, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2008).
Cook, Semmel, and Gerber (1999) studied principal and teacher attitudes toward inclusion, reporting several problem areas with inclusion. Of the 113 principal and teacher participants, only 38% felt they had adequate material support, 29% reported adequate training or expertise, 28% said they had time to plan and implement the necessary curriculum, and only 11% reported they had the necessary personnel support required to implement inclusion. Further, the full-inclusion movement has been criticized for placing students, regardless of their disability, in regular classes.

Educators face the challenge of following federal mandates of ensuring student IEP goals, accommodations, and modifications are in place while working toward inclusion. Kauffman, McGee, and Brigham (2004) stated special educators must be specially trained professionals that strive to find a balance between making adaptations to the curricula and environments, increasing expectations for success, and having a clear understanding of the individual needs of the students. Gartin and Murdick (2000) outlined essential components that should be evident in all general and special education preparation programs. These components include information regarding ethical decision-making in which each prospective teacher identifying his/her own code of ethics. Further, future teachers need to carefully examine educational case studies, using these to analyze their own decision-making from an ethical and moral standpoint. Finally, the authors recommended future teachers increase their knowledge and understanding of special education decision-making by participating in an extensive study of special education law.

Mandates of IDEA and NCLB have not only increased the access to the general education context and content for students with disabilities, but also increased teacher
accountability for these students and their academic growth. By the 1970’s public laws designed to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities gave way to an increase in special educator teacher training. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) highlighted the need for more and better qualified special education teachers. While the number of ESE teachers has slightly increased, the issues of qualification and teacher retention still exist. IDEA increased the number of students eligible for services, while NCLB increased the qualification standards for teachers. This combination has made teacher shortages even greater (Nichols, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2008). Frederick J. Weintraub (2012) reported that while we are not currently facing a national shortage of ESE teachers, we are facing the problem of ESE teachers leaving special education to teach in the general education setting. “We will never meet the demand by focusing only on entry into the profession; we must also increase retention and the desire of leavers to return” (p. 50).

More students were educated in a general education setting in the 1990’s, however concerns arose regarding successful accommodations of these students as well as training programs offered to special educators (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson, 2012). More recently, the Response to Intervention (RtI) movement has the potential to clarify the roles of both the general education and special education teachers and improve the outcomes for students with learning difficulties. RtI involves three distinct tiers of instruction and interventions. At Tier I, classroom teachers monitor the progress of students and develop modifications to the general curriculum if necessary. Tier II requires more intensive interventions and modification/accommodations, but special educators and other specialists may become involved in the process to evaluate and assess more intensive strategies. Students in Tier III receive
intensive, direct instruction with ongoing assessments and interventions related to the data and results. Students may receive special education services at this level by certified special education teachers, who must be prepared for these roles in order for students to receive the individualized instruction they need in an inclusion setting (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

Educators and administrators working in the field of special education are wrought with ongoing moral and ethical predicaments. In 1983, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) adopted a code of ethics to ensure professional conduct and ethical decision-making. It was comprised of the following principles:

1. Special education professionals are committed to developing the highest educational and quality of life potential of exceptional individuals.
2. Special education professionals promote and maintain a high level of competence and integrity in practicing their profession.
3. Special education professionals engage in professional activities, which benefit exceptional individuals, their families, other colleagues, students, or research subjects.
4. Special education professionals exercise objective professional judgment in the practice of their profession.
5. Special education professionals strive to advance their knowledge and skills regarding the education of exceptional individuals.
6. Special education professionals work within the standards and policies of their profession.
7. Special education professionals seek to uphold and improve where necessary the laws, regulations, and policies governing the delivery of special education and related services and the practice of their profession.

8. Special education professionals do not condone or participate in unethical or illegal acts, nor violate professional standards adopted by the Delegate Assembly of CEC. (p. 205, as cited by Fiedler & Van Haren, 2009).

ESE educators face the challenge of following federal policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensuring adequate yearly progress is made while guaranteeing children with Individual Education Plans (IEP) receive the services they need in their least restrictive environment.

Now more than ever, ESE teachers’ perceptions of disabilities and their role in helping provide services to families and students are crucial. A significant shift was made from a medical or deficit model of special education to the most recent push for a model of inclusion, allowing educators to focus on the sociological and environmental factors impacting children, and working toward providing interventions and supports that allow the student to participate in a least restrictive environment as mandated by IDEA. While the medical model focuses on finding a solution or cure for the disability, an inclusionary model focuses on increasing academic performance, strengthening social skills, and improving the attitudes of nondisabled adults and peers through integration (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Historical perceptions regarding disability focused on unfortunate and undesirable conditions to be overcome (Kauffman, McGee, & Brigham, 2004). The disability rights movement, beginning with compulsory education laws of 1840, the Education for All
Handicapped Children Act (now IDEA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, all helped to develop national activities, programs, and support services. The fact remains that discrimination and negative perceptions still exist. “Rather than being seen as helpful, as a way of creating opportunity, special education is often portrayed as a means for shunting students into dead-end programs and killing opportunity” (Kauffman, McGee, & Brigham, 2004, p. 616). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 reiterates the importance of setting high expectations and ensuring access to the general education curriculum as well as providing supports in the general education classrooms whenever possible. The reauthorization also recognized the importance of providing intensive, high quality professional development to ensure ESE teachers have the necessary skills to implement researched based practices. These skills are necessary to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are met. Brandes & Crowson (2009) surveyed 190 educators enrolled in undergraduate special education courses. Results indicated that pre-service and new teacher beliefs and attitudes played a critical role in both their attitude toward students with disabilities and support for inclusive practices. Further research by Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) showed issues such as salaries, certification status, working conditions, lack of support, and discipline/behavior problems all contribute to the high attrition rate of ESE teachers. These factors play a critical role in the development of teacher attitudes and perceptions. While much research has been done in understanding the PPTs of teacher candidates and classroom teachers, empirical research related to ESE educators’ personal practical theories is scant.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Methodology

This qualitative research study explored the development of Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher and leader’s personal practical theories and how they are used in daily decision-making, personal reflective practice, and provision of services for families of students with disabilities. According to Stake (1995), “the function of qualitative research is not to map and conquer the world, but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (pg. 42). Feelings, perceptions, and actions as they relate to working with children with disabilities were explored in order to understand and appreciate the underlying beliefs of educators who engage in the learning process through different roles.

Prior to 1975, action research focused on a process-product approach of teacher effectiveness, without necessarily focusing on teacher thought processes. Additional research focused on such areas as teacher planning, planning and action, teachers interactive thoughts and decisions, teacher attributions and behaviors and teachers’ implicit theories (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Although much research has been conducted on teacher thinking and personal theorizing, a lack of research exist on personal theorizing and thought process of teachers and administrators working with students with disabilities. This study attempts to develop a greater understanding of how these assumptions, perceptions, and theories are developed and how they impact students in special education. The information gained may also help inform effective leadership practices as it relates to the education of students with disabilities.

The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the personal practical theories of teachers and administrators who work with children with disabilities,
specifically those in Caroline County K-12 School District. The goal was to collect and provide in-depth, rich descriptions of ESE educators’ PPTs, how they developed, and how they drive the decision-making process. The initial guiding questions presented in chapter 1 are presented again below:

1. What are the PPTs of ESE educators?
   a) Teachers
   b) Leaders

2. What factors influence the development of PPTs?
   a) How do training, experience, and formal theory factor into the development of PPTs?
   b) How do the ESE leaders and teachers’ perceptions of support within the district and school influence their PPTs?

3. How has changing role/responsibilities within the district impacted PPTs?

4. How do PPTs impact special educators’ work with students with disabilities?

5. How does reflective practice help in the refinement of ESE teachers’ PPTs?

This study sought to understand the PPTs of ESE teachers and leaders and their impact on decision-making. The educator participants in this study are classroom teachers or educational leaders. The difference being the expectations placed on the role within the school and district. The classroom teachers’ responsibilities are limited to the students and families listed on their class rosters. They may take on leadership roles within the school by participating
on different committees or by becoming mentors, however, they were not in a position to lead, coach, or guide other teachers during the timeframe of the study. The leaders’ roles within the district are those of coaching and guiding other teachers either at the school level or district level. The leaders help develop and implement professional development, ensure IEP compliance at the school level, work closely with administrators completing classroom observations and coaching cycles, and provide guidance to teachers in the decision-making process. Leaders work to develop academic and behavioral interventions, monitor data collection and progress of students, and ensure classrooms meet the quality program indicators as mandated by the district. For the purposes of this study, leaders are not administrative and have no evaluative power.

Purposive sampling permits the researcher to select participants from whom the most can be learned (Merriam, 2002, Patton, 2002). It was important for the researcher to select information rich cases that were central to the purpose of the study. The first step in purposive sampling is to set the criteria for choosing the participants. The researcher chose participants who were highly qualified as defined by NCLB, who worked specifically with students with disabilities and who were willing to share information regarding their experiences. The researcher has personally observed these educators in classrooms and working with parents as well as colleagues, which was the basis for their selection. Johnson and Leavitt (2001) described the steps in qualitative research as collecting data from interviews, determining common themes, articulating and validating provocative propositions, supporting analysis, and developing, implementing and evaluating action plans. The knowledge gained from the current research project may provide insight into the challenges ESE educators face, why they do what they do, and their perceptions of their role in providing services to families. This knowledge is critical
because teachers’ beliefs impact their practices and actions in the classroom (Chant 2002 as cited by Levin & He, 2008).

*The Researcher*

The role of the researcher as multi-faceted. In case studies, the researcher acts as teacher, knowing what readers need to learn and informing the reader and relaying the experiences of the participants. Researchers may show restraint in describing and interpreting their findings, revealing the interactions between the researcher and phenomena. The researcher is also an evaluator and interpreter, making interpretations that may be evaluative in nature and recognizing problems, making connections, and finding solutions understandable to others. In this role, the researcher pays close attention to the strengths and weaknesses of his/her research. As biographer, the researcher describes participants in depth, creating a vivid, complex picture for the readers. The roles of the researcher in case study research work together to ensure the researcher contributes the uniqueness of each case and the reader understands the unique perspectives of the participants (Stake, 1995).

Marshall and Rossman (2011) described the researcher’s role in qualitative research as one in which the researcher enters the lives of the participants in a genuine and personal way whether through long-term ethnographies or brief and personal interviews. Likewise, Merriam (1998) made clear the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 7). The researcher may respond to the context of the data, ask questions and probe the participants to delve deeper. He or she must be sensitive to nonverbal cues and body language, clarifying and exploring responses. The goal of qualitative research is to gather thick, rich descriptions and gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of the participants. The
researcher is human, leaving room for unintentional errors, combating personal bias, and perhaps missed opportunities. Merriam suggested researchers work toward developing traits and characteristics that can help them through the journey. Flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity as well as sensitivity to the variables impacting their research including people, settings, personal bias, and agendas are essential traits for qualitative researchers. Finally, researchers must develop skills in good communication, building trust and rapport, listening, and developing empathy for participants (Merriam, 1998).

This researcher’s role as an ESE teacher and site coach allowed her a more comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and rewards of working with students with disabilities. Personal insight was gained into the specific needs of teachers and families and the difficulties of providing support and services. As site coach for a large communication and social skills (CSS) department, an awareness of personal views of roles and responsibilities of ESE teachers, coaches, and administrators was made. The researcher specifically focused on their viewpoints, perspectives, and theories. This helped inform her interpretation and analysis of the data as PPT data and narratives were collected. Patton (2002) describes reflexivity as a way of acknowledging the importance of self-awareness and the ownership of the researcher’s perspective. Reflexivity was practiced by self-reflection on the part of the researcher, keeping in mind her role, seeking the perspectives of the participants, while bracketing assumptions and seeking participant confirmation of the emerging themes.

The researcher’s experiences in conducting observations and implementing interventions in over 15 classrooms over the past several years offered insight into the complexity of ESE classrooms and challenges facing ESE teachers. CCSD teachers use very prescribed curriculum
for students on Access Points including PCI Reading, Number Worlds, and Unique Learning Systems (ULS). Access Points were written as part of the changes to the Sunshine State Standards to allow students with cognitive disabilities more access to the general education curriculum and standards. They follow the intent of the general education standards and objectives with three levels designed to provide support to students with differing cognitive abilities as needed: Participatory, Supportive, and Independent levels. The Access Points standards were developed through cooperation with the Florida Department of Education, ESE teachers, and parents and staff from the Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities Project (cpalms.org, 2007). Students working on Access Points take alternative assessments and are on track to receive alternative diplomas. The decision to place students on Access Points is determined by the IEP team and is reflected in the IEP. The curriculum used by CCSD supports students on Access Points.

PCI reading is designed for students with cognitive disabilities and focuses on sight word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary. The program is a five-step lesson cycle and is meant to be used with one-on-one, direct instruction with the student repeating the lesson until the word is mastered. The Number Worlds curriculum is built on the Common Core State Standards specific to students with cognitive disabilities working on an Access Point curriculum. The math intervention program provides real world applications and hands on learning for students in grades PreK-8. Unique Learning Systems (ULS) is an Internet based special education program for students on Access Points that accommodates leaners with significant cognitive disabilities. ULS differentiates instruction in all core subjects for students who have tested at the participatory, supportive, and independent levels. All of the curricula provide
detailed, scripted lesson plans, easy data collection, and focus on increasing communication and independent functioning.

While ESE teachers in the district use aforementioned prescriptive curriculums, the complexity of teaching 10 or more students with varying disabilities presents a number of challenges. Teachers developed interventions for students with self-injurious behaviors, PICA, aggressive behaviors, and elopement, with the assistance of the researcher. In addition, teachers in a CSS setting are working toward increasing communication for students who may be nonverbal or have limited verbal ability and building social skills. The nature of their disabilities often limits their ability to interact appropriately with others or function independently. The National Health Interview Study (2010) found children with disabilities are at an increased risk for many other health conditions, which require additional health and specialist services (Shieve, Gonzalez, Boulet, Visser, Rice, Van Naarden-Braun, Boyle, 2012). Many teachers in these settings have roles that also include toileting, feeding, transferring students who may have limited mobility, and working with students with significant medical issues common in ESE students including seizures, asthma, and a variety of sensory issues. It is important for ESE teachers to have a clear understanding of the individual needs of the students and develop relationships with families. It is also critical for teachers to have detailed schedules, or zoning plans, for their classrooms. Zoning plans (Appendix E) show what each student should be doing throughout the day. It includes how the paraprofessional and teacher will work with individual students, toileting and eating schedules, interventions, and the students’ schedule of services that may include speech, language, physical, and/or occupational therapies. Often ESE students stay with the same teacher for three years. This may be an added benefit as it allows the teachers to
develop strong bonds with the students and families and more time to implement the much needed behavioral and academic interventions.

Decision-making regarding educational practices happens throughout the day in classrooms. In the Naturalistic Teacher Decision-Making Model (Cornett, 1990a), a teacher’s PPTs are at the center of all decision-making. Teachers’ PPTs help determine their vision/mission of teaching and leadership, guide their planning and implementation, and serve as a catalyst for self-reflection and change. Data from the PPT workbook (Appendix C) focus on five areas an individual feels especially good about in their career, personal and formal theory influences, and a week’s decision log with descriptions of the planning, interactive, and reflective phases. The model (Figure 1) will demonstrate the impact of PPTs on teacher decision-making by showing the influence of PPTs at each phase. A teacher’s PPTs influence decisions made regarding the chosen curriculum and instructional decisions (A). In the planning phase (B), teachers are impacted by their PPTs as well as external influences (F) such as parents, legislation, administration, district staff and protocol, economics, and colleagues. Teacher plans are implemented during the interactive phase (C). Finally, the teacher reflects on his/her practice (D) (Cornett, 1990a). Ultimately, a teacher’s PPTs form the “central filter” for the overall curriculum and instructional practices taking place within the classroom (Ross, Cornett, McCutcheon, 1992). The model was used to analyze the data and help participants understand the alignment between personal theorizing and decision-making.

The researcher’s PPTs as derived from her workbook developed as a site coach and ESE teacher are shown in Table 1.
Table 1

*Personal Practical Theories as Defined by the Site Coach*

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**THEORY 1:** Individual needs of students and families are a top priority. The needs of the students should come before the needs of the adults involved, including teachers, administrators, and/or parents.

**THEORY 2:** Teachers must be advocates for families and have empathy for their needs and challenges. Many students with disabilities have intense needs and parents can often been overwhelmed. Our role as educators and human beings is to reach out and help in any way we can.

**THEORY 3:** Make careful decisions as they have lasting effects on students, families, and coworkers.

**THEORY 4:** Collaboration is Key! Teachers working in ESE need to have a team mindset. We must work together to support each other and provide help, fresh ideas, and ensure our students receive high quality instruction.

**THEORY 5:** High expectations for academics and behaviors must be set in order for students to be successful in school and life.

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The researcher developed her PPTs through her doctoral studies with her advisor. While her position and job responsibilities changed over the course of her studies, her PPTs did not. The researcher listed student improvement, parent/teacher trust, being a mentor/role model, family empowerment, and the ability to provide support and training to teachers and parents as five things she feels especially good about in her career. The researcher listed three professional mentors and her grandmother as personal theory influences, while identifying Vygotsky,
Constructivist Learning Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory as formal theory influences.

Reflecting on how the researcher’s PPTs related to her teaching practice, alignment was found between practice and action. An examination of PPTs within the Naturalistic Leadership Decision-Making Model, led to a review of a week’s decision-making in the planning, interactive, and reflective phases (Figures 2, 3, and 4). One significant event that emerged was planning and preparation for a manifestation hearing for a student with an emotional and behavioral disability. The student brought a weapon to school and was able to articulate intention to use it on other students that “bothered him.” The hearing was to determine if behavior was a result of his disability. As the site coach of the department, one role is to find resources to support the needs of the student. This particular student had been in crisis since September and the researcher reached out to several outside sources for support, including the Department of Children and Families, district social workers, a crisis intervention team, and CCSD homeless student hotline. While investigators completed paperwork and spoke with parents, little help or support was given to the student. The site coach found a disconnect between the departments and ultimately a breakdown in providing much needed support, resulting in tension between beliefs and actions because the external influences prevented following PPTs 1, 3, and 4: the individual needs of the student are a top priority, teachers must be advocates for families, and collaboration is key. Cornett (1990b) suggested that tensions might work to strengthen, diminish, or create new and/or additional theories in order to deal with the practical aspects of teaching. This event was a clear reminder of the power of external
influences and strengthened a resolve to continue her work as an advocate for children with disabilities.

Additional external influences impacted decision-making as insufficient training and professional development opportunities for ESE teachers, extensive time required to receive support from the district, and lack of understanding regarding the needs of students. These external influences were apparent in the planning, interactive, and reflective phases of the decision-making log. Figure 2 shows the planning phase and deliberations for preparing a student to move to regular standards and a general education setting. This decision aligns with the PPTs:

- Individual needs of students and families are a top priority (1)
- Advocate for families and have empathy for their needs and challenges (2)
- Make careful decisions, they have lasting effects on students, families, and coworkers (3)
- Set high expectation (5).

An action plan was further described for a student with aggressive behaviors. This decision and deliberation align with all five of the PPTs. Preparing for a manifestation hearing for a student with autism included:

- Individual needs of students and families are a top priority (1)
- Advocate for families and have empathy for their needs and challenges (2)
- Make careful decisions, they have lasting effects on students, families, and coworkers (3)
- Collaboration is Key (4).
Finally the researcher met with administration to request a special class for the student who demonstrated readiness for full inclusion. This also aligns with all five PPTs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Phase</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Plan</td>
<td>My Deliberations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for the MRT meeting took several months. I have been collecting data, doing trials, and providing much needed support to this student. This student is capable of doing work in a less restrictive environment and moving toward a standard diploma.</td>
<td>My deliberation was to move this student into the general education setting as quickly as possible, with supports, so no additional time was lost. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met with a teacher to develop an action plan for a student with severe aggressive and self-injurious behaviors. This is required by the Department of Education (DOE) because of the use of Professional Crisis Management (PCM).</td>
<td>The DOE requires an action plan for every child who has to have PCM implemented. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and prepare all paperwork for a manifestation hearing for a student with autism.</td>
<td>This student has been in crisis since September. He is homeless and mom has refused help. The Department of Children and Families has been called several time. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and prepare a meeting with administration to request a special class for students who may be able to transition to general education settings.</td>
<td>We have about 15 students who would greatly benefit from additional services to help them move toward a general education setting. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2 Planning Phase Site Coach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Phase</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>My Deliberations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the MRT meeting, the student’s mother, caregiver, behavior interventionist, and county support staff attended. I spoke to the group about the data collected, our concerns for student and his move to a standard diploma track. all involved agreed with the decision to place the student in a general education setting and a new IEP was created.</td>
<td>I think my decision making was accurate in this case and supported by the parent, caregiver and county support staff. All of the data collected supported our decision. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The action plan is needed to ensure all possible behavior interventions and data collection are in place to prevent the use of PCM and ensure student is successful in replacement behaviors and self-calming strategies.</td>
<td>This student has struggled throughout the year with aggressive behaviors. We have been successful in some cases, but additional interventions are needed. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student brought a weapon to school and this prompted the need for a conduct review. Paperwork was completed and the team had to decide how to move forward in helping the student.</td>
<td>Ultimately it was decided that the behavior was a manifestation of the disability. However, no additional services were provided to the family. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several kids in our low incidence classes can be moved to general education classes if they had additional supports.</td>
<td>As a site coach, I have to ensure that IEP’s are in compliance and students who are capable are given every opportunity to succeed and move toward a standard diploma if possible. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The researcher’s own personal theorizing, as a site coach, research and coursework with her advisor provided unique insight into the process and allowed her to share this knowledge while guiding the participants through the PPT process. The researcher understood the value of developing and analyzing alignment between PPTs and action and realized the need for this type of reflection among her ESE colleagues in all three phases (Figures 2, 3, 4). Her concerns about the CAST system and it’s perceived unfair evaluation of ESE teachers led to the search for a more appropriate method of self-reflection and evaluation.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling. One early childhood teacher and one secondary teacher, a site coach, and two district level instructional program specialists were invited to participate. All selected participants work with exceptional
students in Pre-K-12 in Caroline County School District (CCSD) (pseudonym). Table 2 shows the demographics of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Role</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
<th>Certification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Site Coach</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>ESE K-12 Educational Leadership&lt;br&gt;Early Childhood PreK-3&lt;br&gt;Elementary 1-6&lt;br&gt;Autism Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson District Specialist</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>ESE K-12 Autism Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yazmine ESE Teacher</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>African American Female</td>
<td>ESE K-12 Elementary Education K-6&lt;br&gt;Autism Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly ESE Teacher</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>African American Female</td>
<td>ESE K-12 Early Childhood PreK-3&lt;br&gt;Autism Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia District Specialist</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Mentally Handicapped K-12 Autism Endorsement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 *Demographics of Participants*

CCSD statistics for the 2012-2013 school year are as follows:

- 204,991 total students under the age of 18
- 16,970 students with Individual Education Plans (IEP)
- 199 schools
- 7,619 teachers
- 1,014 instructional aides

Participants were identified based on their level of expertise, specifically receiving their autism endorsement from the state of Florida and K-12 ESE certification as well as their role in working with students with disabilities either as a teacher or leader. Selected participants were
highly reflective based on previous interactions and observations by the researcher and were willing to disclose knowledge that may enhance ESE education. Teachers are described as classroom teachers working with ESE students in a K-12, self-contained setting. They are responsible for the day-to-day instruction, implementation of interventions, IEP compliance for their caseload, and curriculum and assessments for their roster of students. Leaders are defined as those individuals working with groups of teachers designing and implementing professional development, coaching and guiding teachers in the development and data collection of appropriate academic and behavioral interventions, and completing classroom observations and coaching cycles to ensure the quality program indicators are in place as mandated by the district.

Individuals were chosen from different roles within the district to gain a variety of views and experiences. District level instructional support specialists and school-based administrators may bring a greater understanding of district protocol, while teachers may tend to focus more on classroom procedures and needs of individual students. Participants were selected based on their knowledge of special education and whether they were considered highly qualified as defined by No Child Left Behind.

Risks/Benefits

To inform the participants of the potential risks and benefits of this study, informed consent procedures were reviewed and participants were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative implications (Appendix A). The purpose of the research and the process of collecting PPT data and interviews were reviewed. Questions or concerns about the nature of this qualitative research process were answered at that time. The selected individuals agreed to participate, informed consent documents were signed, and appointments for
the initial PPT data collection were scheduled.

There were minimal risks in this study, however, inherent in all inquiry with human subjects, the basic moral principles of respect for persons, justice, and beneficence must be followed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Participants in this study may have felt inadequate in their practice after developing and reviewing their PPTs, especially if they find their PPTs did not align with their practice. Merriam (1998) suggested that structured or semi-structured interviews might lead participants to “feel their privacy has been invaded, they may be embarrassed by certain questions, and they may tell things they never intended to reveal” (p. 214). It was critical for the participants to understand there would be no judgment on the part of the researcher and their value was the researcher’s top priority.

Potential benefits of participating in the PPT process were improved practice and greater awareness of the alignment between theories and action. Additionally, information learned from participants may add to the literature and knowledge base of thoughts and actions of exceptional student educators. This knowledge may help improve teacher preparation programs, professional development, and provision of services for families.

Data Collection

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a greater understanding of ESE teachers’ and leaders’ personal practical theories and how they impact action. After the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B), each participant was contacted by phone at their schools and/or offices. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and invited him or her to participate. The researcher followed up with phone calls allowing participants to ask questions and/or voice concerns. Expectations for participation,
informed consent, confidentiality, and benefits were explained. Additionally, the PPT data collection process, as well as the 1-2-hour time allotment needed to complete the interviews was explained. A copy of the proposal, which included chapters 1-3, was emailed to each participant to give them a background of the study. All interviews were audio recorded on the researcher’s personal computer for transcriptions and stored on a password protected, secure server.

*Primary Data Collection*

Participants were individually guided through the PPT process, completing four individual workbooks (Appendix C). The researchers PPTs were included in the study as well. As a teacher/leader in CCSD, the researcher had her own information to contribute regarding the beliefs, theories, and practices of ESE educators.

The process was guided by PowerPoint data worksheets focusing on nine areas of theorizing and alignment:

1. Five things I feel especially good about in my career;
2. My week’s decision log;
3. Five things I did this week;
4. My leadership PPTs;
5. Personal influences on my PPTs;
6. Formal theory influences on my PPTs;
7. Data sheets on planning, interactive, and postactive phases of my decision-making;
8. Congruence analysis;
9. Plan for improvement based upon the analysis.
All participants were asked to identify PPTs following the procedures outlined by data sheets. They clearly defined the beliefs that guide their practices in working with students with disabilities, provided examples of actions and decisions, identified the personal and formal sources of their PPTs, and completed the planning, interactive, and postactive phases in order to evaluate whether their PPTs aligned with their actions.

Data collection began using Cornett’s (1990a) Model for the Impact of Teacher Personal Practical Theories on the Curricular and Instructional Decision Making of Teachers. This model focuses on guiding teachers to examine their personal practical theories as they are influenced by the curriculum, the planning process, and instructional interaction including human, material, temporal, and content. The educator reflects on the alignment between and among their PPTs, decision-making, and how PPTs are impacted by external influences. This model was used to guide the participants through the PPT process and teach them how to develop their own PPTs using the workbook. Prior to gathering data on teaching practices, the participants listed and clearly defined their personal practical theories and possible external influences on each theory. Next, each participant described how their PPTs were manifested in practice by describing lessons and/or recent decisions and explaining their thinking during the planning, interactive, and reflective stages (Cornett, 1990a). Stages 8 and 9 had participants carefully examine the alignment between PPTs and practice and develop an action plan providing additional insight into their practice. Finally, participants were encouraged to summarize how PPTs guided student learning.

*Semi-structured Interviews*

Each participant engaged in semi-structured interviews designed to explore their thoughts
and theories and develop a greater understanding of how their theories are revised, implemented, and serve as the foundation for action. The interview phase allowed the participants to look at the alignment between and among their PPTs and actions. Views on their role as educators and advocates for students and families were also discussed. This information may be critical for educators to work toward providing services for students and families, setting goals for students, and helping students with disabilities reach their full potential.

Hatch (2002) described the value of in-depth, semi-structured interviews in that questions are prepared in advance in anticipation of the interview and designed to guide the conversation. Hatch recommended open-ended questions, using language that is familiar, clear and neutral. The interviewer must be respectful of participants, valuing the knowledge they bring to your research. Hatch also indicted the importance of having a metacognitive awareness when listening in that “part of my brain is constantly monitoring what I do or say as a researcher” (pg. 108). Spradley (1979) stated an ethnographic model could be used to design questions that are descriptive, structural, or contrast in nature. These types of interview questions allow the researcher to gain greater understanding of the knowledge brought by the participants provide participants ways to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation, and look at similarities and differences among participants and their perceptions.

Semi-structured interview questions were developed and revised to encourage participants to describe their knowledge and experiences based on the foundational work of the PPT data collection. Spradley and Hatch’s suggestions for developing descriptive questions for interviews was used, beginning with questions such as “What are the “non-negotiables” when it comes to teaching children with disabilities?” and moving toward example and experience
questions such as “What are some of the challenges you face working with children with disabilities?” (Appendix D). Semi-structured, in-depth questions are more fluid and flexible than structured interview questions allowing for more in-depth perspective from participants. Additionally, these types of questions allow the interviewer to explore certain topics more closely and increase flexibility in probing.

Data Analysis

Comparative Case Analysis

The researcher began the data analysis by reviewing each individual’s PPT PowerPoint workbook, interview transcript, and researcher field notes. Each was used as a basis for individual case analysis to identify insights and additional questions for clarification. Cases were reviewed to code and reduce the data. Codes were grouped into families and tentative themes were identified from the PPT workbook and supported by information from the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) described a theoretical approach to thematic analysis, providing clear guidelines for qualitative researchers attempting to identify patterns within data. The researcher followed the authors’ suggested phases of the process by first familiarizing herself with the data by transcribing, re-reading and taking detailed notes on preliminary ideas. Initial ideas found meaningful and relevant to the study were organized using a color-coding system. The researcher met with her advisor for peer debriefing to discuss the initial codes and collate data. The list of codes were sorted into potential themes using thematic mapping. The researcher looked at the relationship between overarching and subthemes, deciding which themes were most significant to the current study. Themes were reviewed and refined, forming coherent patterns. Finally, themes were taken from the map of the data and named according to the
essence of what they described (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All PPT themes were sent to participants for member checking.

Establishment of Trustworthiness

Establishing validity and reliability involves conducting qualitative research in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher used the basic strategies of collecting thick, rich descriptions, member checking, and triangulation to ensure trustworthiness will be met. Thick rich descriptions, including quotes and details, offer the reader enough information to determine if their situations closely match the situations and perspectives of the participants. Stake (2000) stated, “Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experiences, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding… [to permit] naturalistic generalizations” (as cited by Patton, 2002, p. 583). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed using the term transferability in the place of generalization when dealing with qualitative research. While this study is not generalizable to other populations, the findings may be transferable to other special educators and leaders, thus leading to improved training, leadership, and provision of services. Huberman and Miles (2002) describe the three targets of generalization as studying what is, what may be, and what could be. While they do not use the term “generalize” in the classical sense, they describe the goal of qualitative studies as seeking to provide a clear picture of the current scene in order to increase understanding and reflect upon improving (what is). ‘What may be’ is creating a vision for the future and possibilities for positive change. Studying ‘what could be’ focuses on locating situations that are exceptional and studying them in detail to determine how we can learn from them. The descriptive nature of this study will help illustrate the complexities of working with students with disabilities, describe
how experiences and worldviews led to current practices, and present findings and viewpoints in a wide variety of ways.

Member checking is a method of validity testing in which the participants confirm the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Member checking allows the researcher to correct any inadequacies or mistakes made in representations of the participants’ perceptions. Copies of the transcriptions were given to each participant for corrections and further insights.

Triangulation, as described by Merriam (1998) and Huberman and Miles (2002), is using multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, and/or multiple methods to strengthen the findings and establish validity. Triangulation was achieved through careful evaluation of PPT data, audiotapes of interviews, and transcripts. Additionally, the researcher met with her advisor often to review the data and debrief.

Review and analysis of transcriptions and PPT workbooks, revealed several themes. To increase credibility, data were reviewed to look for contradictions or trends and patterns that did not fit within the themes. Negative case analysis forces the researcher to look closely for alternative constructs and opportunities for new learning (Patton, 2002). This adds credibility and authenticity to a study by allowing the researcher to openly look for other possibilities and different points of view. None were found. The researcher sent each participant a list of themes matching their PPTs and asked for verification. Each participant verified, through email, that their original list of PPTs was correct.

Ethics

Patton (2002) suggested that establishing relationships with participants is a critical skill for researchers. Building trust will be a necessary component for developing relationships with
the participants, establishing rapport, and promoting dialogue that is collaborative and interactive. The researcher’s goal was to create an environment of fellowship and empathy, gaining access to the perspectives of the participants in order to gather in-depth data regarding the development of their individual PPTs and how they align with their current practices. All materials, including PPT PowerPoint data, computer tape recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes were stored on a password protected, secure server. Each participant was given a pseudonym chosen by the researcher to ensure anonymity. Interviews were recorded on the researcher’s password protected, personal computer. After the transcription process, recordings were destroyed.

In summary, this chapter described the research design, outlined the research questions, the role of the researcher, participants, and comparative case study methodology. Additionally, this chapter addressed trustworthiness, and ethics. All of these aspects were presented as they related to understanding the personal practical theories of ESE teachers and leaders and their impact on decision-making. The following chapters will describe the results of this effort, findings, discussion, and implications of this research as well as the possibility for future research.
CHAPTER 4

A rationale for the study, review of the current literature, and description of the methodology of the study were provided in the previous chapters. This research focused on identifying the personal practical theories of two teachers and two district level support specialists as well as the PPTs of the researcher. The research questions were:

1. What are the PPTs of ESE educators?
   a) Teachers
   b) Leaders

2. What factors influence the development of PPTs?
   a) How do training, experience, and formal theory factor into the development of PPTs?
   b) How do the ESE leaders and teachers’ perceptions of support within the district and school influence their PPTs?

3. Has a change in role/responsibilities within the district impacted PPTs?

4. How do PPTs impact special educators’ work with students with disabilities?

5. How does reflective practice help in the refinement of ESE teachers PPTs?

With the purpose of understanding the PPTs of the participants and the implications for decision-making and practice, the researcher began working with Jackson, Yazmine, Kimberly, and Patricia (all pseudonyms assigned by the researcher) to help them articulate their personal
practical theories in working with students with disabilities. The primary focus of the data collection was to “listen” to the participants and develop a greater understanding of how they developed their PPTs, roles and responsibilities in working with children and families, and how PPTs guide their practice. Through meetings, data collection, field notes, and interviews a clear picture of each participant’s experiences and beliefs were captured. Four cases are presented in this chapter in order of the interviewing process beginning with the first interview. There is no intentional ordering of the interviews or presentation of the cases.

Context of the Cases

Four participants selected for participation in this study were chosen based on a purposeful sampling framework. They were identified based on their work with ESE students, as well as their willingness to become more knowledgeable about their own practice. All participants were deemed highly qualified by NCLB, work specifically with students with disabilities, and had been previously observed by the researcher. Participants were contacted by phone and asked to participate. Five participants originally agreed. One declined after the initial data collection phase due to time constraints. The researcher met with all participants in January 2015 to review the PPT workbook and consent. Participants expressed their willingness to participate and share their experiences in order to fully develop and understand how their PPTs impacted their decision-making. Participants were willing to make time for interviews after the initial PPT collection phase.

Participants’ Theories

Jackson. Jackson is a 35-40 year old white male who has been in education for ten years. His degree is in history and anthropology, however after several jobs he entered a
program called “Transition to Teaching” and completed a yearlong apprenticeship with a Vocational Education teacher. Jackson taught for four years and was a site coach for four years before taking on his current position with Caroline County School District as Communication and Social Skills (CSS) support staff. He has been in this position for two years and supports eight schools in the district with over 40 CSS sites. These sites teach students with autism and related disabilities in low-incidence and inclusion settings. Low incidence settings provide alternative curriculum and life skills training for students with disabilities who have limited access to the general education programs as determined by their Individual Education Programs (IEP). Students in inclusion settings are integrated into the general education programs as much as possible as determined by their IEPs.

Jackson reported in his workbook the top five things he feels especially good about in his career are (1) the positive effect he has on the lives of children, (2) having a career he is proud of, (3) his career allows him to be an active part of the lives of his own children, (4) his continued success in the field, and (5) being a team member and leader. His PPTs from the workbook and interview are defined as follows (bold wording is from the workbook, non-bold wording is from the interview):

Table 3

*Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Jackson*

**THEORY 1:** There should be a measurable and observable goal of what students are to learn.

**THEORY 2:** There should be an expectation that all students will be successful to a degree that is appropriate for them. Every student can be successful and if you don’t have that expectation, they will not progress (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).
THEORY 3: Teachers must be well trained and knowledgeable of what they are to teach and methods on how to teach it. We see deficits in the environments with our population of students and the focus should be on the quality of professional development (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

THEORY 4: Every student should be respected, cared for, and given a fun and engaging learning environment. Being respected and cared for builds trust. Students can’t trust the environment they’re in without knowing that they are respected (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

THEORY 5: Time should be taken to examine and consider what is the most desirable, yet realistic educational outcome and route to achieve that outcome. We work with students with intensive needs and that can sometimes be too much to deal with. So, we must break it down to what is most important for this kid and focus on that. Once that is mastered, we can start branching out, but still keep it simple and focused (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Jackson’s role is to work closely with the site coaches to ensure the teachers are receiving the support they need in the classrooms, ensuring best practice instruction, developing trainings, and developing plans for specific behavioral problems. His focus is on helping design and provide professional development that is appropriate and meaningful to teachers who specifically work with students with disabilities. When describing the challenges of this aspect of his job, he stated, “In our population, I think the administration doesn’t always know exactly what the expectations are. So, if the expectations aren’t completely clear, then the trainings can’t be perfectly lined up.” (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015). Additionally, Jackson discussed the importance of collaboration and giving back to the community in the following:

You have to be part of a team where everybody has a role. Sometimes that role is a leader; sometimes that role is a recorder or a follower, or a doer. Whatever it is it’s equally important, it’s just a different role (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).
He further commented:

I think parents have kids and their responsibility is to educate them and to prepare them. But, I also think it is the community’s responsibility to do that same thing. It is not just a single facet aspect to humanity; it’s got to be all of it. And the education system is part of that community experience (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

His parents as well as childhood and college teachers have influenced Jackson’s personal theories. Jean Piaget, B. F. Skinner and Maslow were identified as formal theory influences. After being diagnosed as a child with an impairment requiring glasses, he excelled academically. Jackson’s parents set high expectations, but never pushed college. His experiences in college were both positive and negative. At one point, he was an education major, but a professor convinced him to take another path. He described the conversation:

I listened to her and I left education all together. And I find it ironic that in the end, I ended up coming back to it. So, it sort of makes me think she was doing something wrong even though she had good intentions. She probably should have worked and been more of a mentor to kids like me (Jackson, April 9, 2015).

Becoming a spouse, father, and role model have had an impact on the development of Jackson’s PPTs as well as his teaching choices. Getting married and instantly becoming a stepfather cemented the fact that he enjoyed teaching and re-opened the doors to education.

Jackson identifies certain challenges in working with exceptional students. These include miscommunication and misinformation. He finds that parents do not always understand their
child’s disability and the services that may be available. Further, he often faces the challenge of parents not fully understanding how different educational environments may impact their child. He described this as follows: “They may have a bad picture or view of what another environment might be like so… they might not realize the benefits that are associated with it” (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015). Another challenge is the lack of knowledge of evidence-based practices in instruction and behavioral interventions. Jackson stated at times he finds teachers are quick to push for a more restrictive setting because of the work involved with implementing interventions, data collection, and monitoring. Lack of training for general education teachers to work with ESE students in an inclusion setting becomes challenging. He stated in his interview that he has worked with many teachers in the general education setting and finds a mix of attitudes. Some are willing, but not able. Others really want to learn, but cannot implement the interventions consistently, while other teachers absolutely hate having inclusion students.

In comparing Jackson’s PPTs to his decision-making within the Naturalistic Model, many external influences emerged. Jackson described what he feels is most concerning:

Well, the education system is huge. Let’s go ahead and say it. There is a public realm, there is a private realm and there are multiple facets of the private realms. It’s just an enormous, enormous thing… I am a person who truly believes in simplicity and I think if there is too much in a system, there will be barriers to how that system works (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Jackson expressed concern the system was too big to be effective, especially when providing
services and supports to students with disabilities. Additionally, Jackson expressed concerns about general education teachers’ reluctance for a student to participate in full inclusion:

I think overall, in the end teachers want to help all of the kids, but I think a lot of the teachers aren’t receptive to inclusive practices. I think they do it because…they think they can’t help the kid enough. But that’s just me personally; I am trying to think positive. But, at the same time I am fully aware that some people are just not willing to help out at all (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Jackson described his role as working to determine which teachers will be receptive to inclusion and interventions. In the end, Jackson stated:

If I feel a teacher is not going to be receptive at all to any interventions, I am automatically more likely to recommend a setting change because I see that as being a barrier. That’s a barrier that cannot be changed and I don’t want to see a kid setback for six months or a year (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Further outside challenges relate to ESE teacher burnout. Jackson revealed:

We are dealing with kids so we have to do academics. In order to do academics we have to deal with the behaviors that interfere with those academics. In order to deal with the behaviors that interfere with academics, we have to deal with the personal needs: the independent functioning and communication side of it. So we have all this stuff to look at. I think for new teachers it’s just a lot. It’s overwhelming. And
that goes back to what I said about making it as simplistic as possible. But, I think one of the greatest things…what makes it very difficult is that our teachers who have been doing it longer start to realize it’s not those things that are the most difficult, it’s how little control we have over the kids and their lives and the affect we have on them. Because we can do so much here at school, but when they go home, we have no control or ability to protect them (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Figure 5 shows Jackson’s Planning Phase of the decision-making process. Part of his plan is to research educational models for students with autism to improve the current CSS program. This plan aligns with his PPTs:

- There should be a measurable and observable goal of what students are to learn (1)
- There should be an expectation that all students will be successful to a degree that is appropriate for them (2)
- Teachers must be well trained and knowledgeable of what they are to teach and methods on how to teach it (3)
- Time should be taken to examine and consider what is the most desirable, yet realistic educational outcome and route to achieve that outcome (5)
Figure 5 Planning Phase Jackson

In the interactive phase of the model, Jackson implements new research-based strategies to improve the design of the CSS program (Figure 6). The external influences impacting Jackson’s decision making are apparent in the reflective phase (Figure 7) where Jackson describes the difficulty of improving a new program due to cost, effectiveness, and peer buy-in.
Ultimately, in the reflective phase, Jackson stated, “There are limits to what can be done and it is beneficial to have ideals, but reality has to be considered as well.” (Jackson, PPT Workbook).
The tension lies in aligning Jackson’s PPT #2, 3, and 4 with his desire and ability to change the CSS programs:

- There should be an expectation that all students will be successful to a degree that is appropriate for them,
- Teachers must be well trained and knowledgeable of what they are to teach and methods on how to teach it,
- Every student should be respected, cared for, and given a fun and engaging learning environment.

Jackson considers himself successful in his job because he genuinely cares for students and their needs, but can turn off that emotion outside of work. He stated that in our profession teachers often see students that are bullied by their peers, neglected at home, have behaviors that significantly interfere with academics, and have increasing communication and independent functioning needs. He stated, in his opinion, these are all factors in the burn out rate for ESE teachers. Jackson reported that his changing role from teacher to site coach to specialist did not have an impact on his PPTs. He felt he has remained steadfast in his beliefs and theories.

**Yazmine.** Yazmine is a 40-45 year old African American female who is in her second year of teaching. She was a paraprofessional and substitute teacher for four years before deciding to return to college to complete the alternative certification program. Teaching was her second career. Her degree was in Food Science and Health from Florida State University. She attended the alternative certification program at Florida State College at Jacksonville and also received her autism endorsement and began teaching 1st-5th grade in a CSS program in a suburban school in Caroline County two years ago. She currently has eight students on Access
Points (modified curriculum) in her classroom with two full-time paraprofessionals. She made the decision to teach children with disabilities because she always gravitated toward the student that seemed to have trouble, was bullied, or treated unfairly. Yazmine reported that she feels especially good about her career because she is blessed to be working at her current school with her co-workers, her job is never boring or without challenges, she is a team player, she has been able to complete all of her certification requirements in a timely manner, and she is excited to increase her knowledge of educational strategies and behavioral interventions. Yazmine’s PPTs from the workbook and interview are as follows:

Table 4

*Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Yazmine*

**THEORY 1:** I must love what I do. If you don’t love what you do it makes it hard for everything else to fall into place (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

**THEORY 2:** The students are the priority.
   I am doing what I do for the students. They should feel loved and safe. Working as a team with my colleagues will increase the chances for student success (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

**THEORY 3:** I must be open-minded to learning from my colleagues, friends, family students, and parents.
   Continual professional development is essential (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

**THEORY 4:** I believe in standing up for what is right, especially for my students. They should be treated fairly and respectfully.

**THEORY 5:** Preparation and careful planning are important, but so are flexibility and the ability to adapt to unexpected changes. If you have a crisis in your classroom, you have to adjust and make it work (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).
Yazmine reported her formal theory influences as portions of Progressivism as well as Essentialism in that she focuses on the child as a whole while providing structure and guidance. Yazmine personally has been greatly influenced by her parents whom she reported are loving, kind, and hardworking. Christianity has also influenced her, especially when it comes to loving others and showing kindness for those in need. These things have provided a strong foundation and prepared her to work with kids who face significant challenges. She remembers teachers who have impacted her as well. When describing how her own teachers handled a young male student with behavior problems she stated, “I remember Ms. Oliver, my 8th grade teacher, she actually went over… this is when teachers could do that back then… she went to dinner at his house to talk about him (the student) and address (his) behavior” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). She stated these role models influenced the relationships she has with parents. When asked if she feels she is an advocate, she responded, “I think so, I think I need to be a little more vocal as far as the school and administration goes. Just to make sure they are treated fairly and get what they need. That they are included” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). Yazmine also contributes her own experiences in school to her desire to advocate and protect students. As the only black student in a gifted program, she was often picked on by the students of her own race for being “too good.” She was bullied for talking different and being articulate. Even now she stated people will often ask where she is from because she doesn’t “sound black.” These experiences led her to be compassionate and protective of others. In her interview she explained her desire to ensure all children are treated respectfully:

When you hear about or see a teacher or parent mistreating a kid, you see that and it makes you want to be more loving toward the kids and make
sure they are getting what they need when they are with you. You want to make sure in the classroom they feel safe and loved and they are also getting the structure they need (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Yazmine stated that interfering behaviors, teaching such a wide range of grade levels, and time requirements for data collection are the biggest challenges she faces on a daily basis with her students. Interfering behaviors include aggression toward staff and peers, elopement, and self-injurious behaviors such as head banging. Even with two paraprofessionals in the room, the time required to work with student behaviors is extensive. She has a student with pica that has to be monitored constantly to ensure his safety. The U. S. National Library of Medicine defines Pica as the intentional consumption of non-edible items such as dirt, plastic, paper, and paint. It effects up to 32% of children between the ages of 1 and 6 (Berger, 2014). Another student wears a helmet and has a student focused paraprofessional to help ensure his safety from self-injurious head banging. Several students are at risk of elopement and require constant supervision. Elopement is common in students with autism and is defined as a dependent individual putting themselves in dangerous or harmful situations by leaving a supervised space and/or the care of the caregiver (Anderson, Law, Daniels, Rice, Mandell, Hagopian, and Law, 2012). Although her students are all on a modified curriculum designed to meet the needs of each student, the needs of the students vary greatly. Teaching five different grade levels is complicated at best. “Even though they are access points, some are higher or at a higher level on access points than others. So that makes it difficult as far as balancing it out” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Yazmine stated it is a work in progress to balance the behavioral needs of students with the academic needs. It requires a lot of planning and flexibility. Additionally, it takes the support of
her colleagues. The team spends time debriefing each day during dismissal. However, there is little planning time to prepare for IEPs or the required data collection.

Yazmine reported in her interview there are a lot of blessings in working with children with disabilities: “It’s always something new. You never know what you’re gonna get. Just the challenge of finding ways to get them to work to their fullest potential is a blessing…getting them to communicate or enjoy the day or be happy” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). Overall, Yazmine believes people have misconceptions about students with disabilities. She is amazed when people comment on how well the students walk in the hall or how well they draw or participate in activities. She stated, “We don’t see that as special because we expect it. That is something we see everyday” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). She further explained even though teachers may experience challenging behaviors, the students should not be excused for it. They may need additional supports and help with calming, but they are still expected to be respectful of staff and peers. The expectation is that they will learn to follow the rules of society, participate to the fullest extent possible, and live as independently as possible.

Examining Yazmine’s PPTs through the Naturalistic Leadership Decision-Making Model reveals several external influences beyond her control. Teaching grades 1-5 to one group of ESE students has its challenges. Yazmine stated:

Even though they are all on access points, having grades 1-5, it is difficult because the difference between doing lessons for a first grader vs. 2nd through 5th… there is a whole difference. Using Unique Learning Systems (the district mandated curriculum for CSS students) is difficult because you can’t do a group project/lesson. Now I have elementary and
intermediate so it makes it hard to do the same lesson (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Additionally, Yazmine reported difficulty in getting the necessary services and supports for students. She described the difficulty in getting a new helmet for a student with severe self-injurious head banging:

It’s been over a year now that we’ve been trying to get the new helmet. And when it came, it hasn’t fit properly so it has actually come back two or three times and I think it’s the third time now and we are having to go a whole new route with a new company (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Yazmine further reported because of scheduling, the ESE department gets all of their resources (PE, music, art, and media) in the same day. The ESE students were “fit in” to the schedules. When asked if she felt the needs of the students were taken into consideration during the scheduling, she stated that she did not. The students move from one resource to the next with no time in between. This is difficult for students who need routine and structure:

For a couple of my students it does make it more difficult because they’re not getting a break. They just have to keep moving from one place to the next. We have to give them that time they need, basically their choice time, their free time to settle back down… to just sit and catch their breath (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

In her zoning plan (Appendix E), Yazmine has a very detailed and structured schedule. Students with disabilities, especially autism and related disabilities, require a very structured, regimented
day. However, having a schedule with resources all on one day prevents the ESE teachers in her department from common planning and developing Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

She described the difficulty:

I mean it’s not expected that we give up our planning time, but there are issues and there have even been cases where someone has gotten hit, even the resource teachers have gotten hit. In our situation we need to stay with our students so that makes it difficult (to take a planning period). We may meet once a week for 30 minutes in the morning, but we never have a chance to meet as a unit and that’s difficult (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Finally, Yazmine expressed concern over not receiving the necessary support from district staff. When describing requesting help for a student with significant aggressive behaviors, Yazmine stated:

We’ve mentioned the student that really needs a student-focused paraprofessional to district people. Just for getting him the help he needs to get into a routine of where he needs to be without having to take away from the other students. Him having somebody would be very beneficial. We’ve had difficulty even having someone from the district come out to do the observations on him. Just come to observe him to see if he needs a change of placement…but getting the district to come and observe has been difficult. They just say there is a list (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).
Figure 8 shows Yazmine’s planning phase and her intention to use the district mandated Unique Learning Systems and PCI Reading curriculum to improve her teaching. This decision aligns with her PPTs:

- The students are the priority. I am doing what I do for the students. They should feel loved and safe. Working as a team with my colleagues will increase the chances for student success.

- Preparation and careful planning are important, but so are flexibility and the ability to adapt to unexpected changes.

Her plan to group her students according to grade and ability level can be seen in the interactive phase (Figure 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Phase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Plan</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the district curriculum guide, the Unique Learning Systems curriculum and the PCI reading system to plan my reading and writing lessons. The writing lessons will remain the same. The students will go to the computer station to participate in a reading activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Deliberations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my students must take the FAA Test. I need to keep the students engaged at the reading station with minimal adult facilitation. The tasks need to be beneficial to their learning, not busy work. (PPTs 2, 5)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 Planning Phase Yazmine
## Interactive Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the morning group session, the students will be informed of the change at the reading station. They will check their schedule for reading and then go to the computer center. They will be told they will go to the Starfall website.</td>
<td>Will the Starfall website be the best site for each student? The students will need to be monitored. Most will remain on the appropriate website but there are two who will attempt to go to other websites. They will go to sites approved for the class but not approved for the current lesson. (PPTs 2, 5)</td>
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Figure 9 Interactive Phase Yazmine

## Reflective Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Implementation</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most of the students stayed on the website. One student continually left the website to use the computer camera. He had to be redirected back to the Starfall website.</td>
<td>The paraprofessionals in the room monitored the students to make sure they were engaged in the website. They students use the Starfall website on a regular basis and are very familiar with it. (PPTs 2, 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 Reflective Phase Yazmine

The reflective phase (Figure 10) clearly shows Yazmine’s constant struggle to monitor students
on several different grade and curriculum levels. Her need to keep students engaged at the reading station with minimal supervision is imperative to her working with individual students using the district curriculum. However, the struggle to keep students engaged and on the correct websites is constant. She remains flexible and ensures that her paraprofessionals monitor students at the reading station. When asked if her changing role from a paraprofessional to a teacher has impacted her PPTs, Yazmine stated she did not believe so. Her PPTs have remained constant since she began working with children.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly is a 40-45 year old African American female with a degree in early childhood education. She is certified PreK-3, ESE K-12 with an autism endorsement. She is in her 2\(^{nd}\) year of teaching in a suburban school in Caroline County. Currently, she teaches ten Kindergarten students on general education standards and access points. Her students vary in the complexity of their needs academically, socially, and behaviorally. In her zoning plan (Appendix F) she has a very structured schedule, allowing direct instruction (DI) with each student every day. Some students are high functioning and have the potential to move toward inclusion, while others are nonverbal and working toward the development of communication skills. She worked as a paraprofessional until she finished her teaching degree in 2009. In completing the workbook, Kimberly reported the five things she feels especially good about in her career as: positive interactions and impact on children, personal growth and knowledge, building relationships with students, her opportunities for professional development, and strengthening family relationships. Her PPTs from the workbook and interview are listed in the following table:

Table 5
THEORY 1: The safety of every student is a priority. Parents send their most precious thing to school for seven hours a day. We are entrusted with their care and must ensure they are safe (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

THEORY 2: Students are provided a means to communicate their needs and wants and we must ensure parent collaboration. Many of our student’s negative behaviors come from not being able to communicate their feelings, wants and needs. We must find ways to help them communicate (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

THEORY 3: Continue to provide current best practice instruction. The more professional development we receive, the more we realize what we didn’t know (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

THEORY 4: Students should feel successful in and out of the classroom. We don’t do anything unless we feel like we CAN do it (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

THEORY 5: I want my students to know I care about their overall well-being. They are children first and should be treated as such. The consideration for any child should be made based on the fact that they are children versus a diagnosis (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Her major personal influences are her three sons, ages 14, 16, and 17, all on the autism spectrum. Her difficulty in going through the diagnosis process with her own children as well as her struggles to get services for her sons have made her an advocate for families. She explained this as follows:

As an educator, I wanted to treat my families they way I wanted to be treated. I feel that children are more than just a number on a piece of paper. There is a lot more to consider than just looking at their diagnosis (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).
Further, Kimberly feels strongly that children with disabilities should not be “fixed.” We can try to shape and mold them so they have an increased ability to socialize, communicate, and function independently, but it is okay for a child to be different. She conveyed her feelings in our interview when she stated, “At some point, it’s not always about trying to make them so normal that they lose themselves, and I think that’s the struggle” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015). She also listed her mother, two professional mentors, and Christianity as influencing her personal theories, while describing Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development as a formal theory influence.

Kimberly’s makes home visits when necessary, goes to birthday parties when invited, and helps parents beyond the school walls. For example, she recently worked with a mother to find a day care that would take her child with a disability so that he could attend extended school year. Many daycares will not accept children with disabilities because of the challenges that come with not being potty trained, lack of verbal skills, and/or having social difficulties. Her own experiences with her sons have prepared her to be a great help to her parents and students. She described the importance of collaborating with parents to provide the best outcome for the students:

Parents have a lot to give. Regardless of what the environment is, they (parents) have a lot of information to give in order for us to make the right decision about that child. If it’s a good environment, great. You know, let’s find out what they are doing, what they can get that child to do and vice versa. If it’s not so good of an environment, what can we do to make that child feel love coming to school? And get those needs met
at school that are not getting met at home… figure out how to get those needs met at home, too if possible (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Kimberly also discussed the importance of increasing a student’s ability to communicate. In describing her role in facilitating this she stated:

A lot of our behavioral issues we have with our children are because they can’t tell you that something hurts, and they feel bad or are having a bad day. We have to be able to make those means of communication available to them so they can say: I am having a great day, I feel okay, I feel great, I am having a bad day, I am just really tired, I don’t like doing this, I’m hungry, I’m thirsty, I need to be changed. Those are basic human feelings, normal things we all take for granted (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Looking at the external influences from the Naturalistic Model, Kimberly reported the major challenges she faces in an ESE classroom are interfering behaviors, the politics of education, and lack of district support. She stated that our youngest ESE students come with difficulties that may not have been addressed yet, including sensory, medical, home, and family issues. A teacher’s role is to find the antecedent for the behavior and implement the right interventions. This can be challenging and Kimberly works closely with the family to get input on the skills that are already in place. When discussing a student with high magnitude disruptive behavior, she stated, “I’ve been working really closely with his mother because he has some skills he could learn…but now there’s a breakdown. He can’t maintain a level of stillness, quietness, and calmness in order to learn. I’m very concerned” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9,
Further, Kimberly described a recent situation in which she became frustrated with the politics of education. Recently she has worked with a family who wants their kindergartener to move from a CSS setting to full inclusion in the general education setting. Kimberly stated that she has to make sure the parents have realistic expectation of what the student is academically capable of while understanding the parents desire to push their children toward a full inclusion. In this case, Kimberly and the occupational therapists agreed with the parents that the child, with supports, might be successful in general education. However, the district staff did not agree and did not back the decision. Ultimately, Kimberly stated:

I feel that we need to not make our parents our enemies. I feel like we have to consider the needs of the family in general…some parents are unrealistic, but I believe there is a happy medium and we have to meet that happy medium. The occupational therapists and I had a list of circumstances that made this worth a shot (trying the student in inclusion) but, they did not back the decision (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Another challenge facing Kimberly is the lack of support for ESE teachers in general. She explained, “I don’t think ESE teachers have as much support as we need…if they want our kids to be successful, we can’t be successful if we don’t have a level of support” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015). When asked who should provide this support, she answered it needs to come, not only from colleagues, but also from administration and district staff:

Don’t make it so hard. I know it’s a money thing, but if a child can
benefit from a one-on-one (student focused paraprofessional), don’t make it a yearlong process. There is no reason. That child has lost a year. Get that child what he needs and get it fast so he can move forward (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

She acknowledges the district support staff may be overwhelmed, but the frustration lies in having people in the field such as teachers, paraprofessionals, and therapists who really want to work and make a difference and ultimately don’t have the support needed to be successful. When describing her view on this problem she stated:

I think they need more people. That is a lot to put on one individual, especially when they have so many sites to deal with. I don’t think one person should be handling eight schools… that’s the breakdown. And I want to know if that’s the contributing factor of why it takes so long to get the support in the classroom because they are only one person (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Figure 11 describes Kimberly’s planning phase of the model. In this phase Kimberly is working to provide a mother with the necessary information regarding transportation to a nearby daycare that would meet the needs of her student. This plan and deliberation aligns with Kimberly’s PPTs:

- The safety of every student is a priority (1)
- Students are provided a means to communicate their needs and wants and parent collaboration is necessary (2)
- Students should feel successful in and out of the classroom (4).
Additionally, she gathers the necessary information to help facilitate the movement of her student to an inclusion setting. This planning and decision aligns with PPTs:

- The safety of every student is a priority (1)
- Continue to provide current best practice instruction (3)
- Students should feel successful in and out of the classroom (4).
- I want my students to know I care about their overall well-being. They are children first and should be treated as such.

Her third deliberation involved attempting to get occupational therapy services for a student. This aligns with PPTs 1-4 as well. Finally, she describes her need for assistance in the writing of a functional behavioral assessment and reaching out to the site coach for training. This plan and decision aligns with her PPTs 1, 2, and 4 as listed above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Plan</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will contact transportation to confirm the zip codes they will service during ESY at Mandarin Oaks Elementary. After receiving that information, I will pass the information to the parent so she can begin the process of locating a center that best fits her needs. I will also ask colleagues and other parents if they know of any highly recommended.</td>
<td>This is a single working parent of a child with profound disabilities. I discussed with her earlier the option of her child attending, but she stated she could not consider it because of daycare and she had it worked out. When the situation changed, she called frantul and wanted help. I told her I will help her. My concern is being able to find a right fit as her child has needs I am not sure if a daycare will provide; but if so, will she be able to afford it. (PPTs 1, 2, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will meet with first and second grade teachers to discuss what skills are needed to be successful in the classroom and also print out the standards for each grade to pass along to parents.</td>
<td>During this year's IEP meetings, parents expressed their concern of adding inclusion. Initial discussions were focused on allowing their child to go for academics, however after further discussions, it was noted it was more for socialization with the hope of grasping academic concepts with support. (PPTs 1, 2, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will have samples of work from the beginning of the year to the present as well as data to support the need of services.</td>
<td>This student began the school year having difficulty with grasping and writing and coloring. We have been working with him throughout the year and he has made significant improvement, but continues to need services. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will make an appointment with my site coach to for her assistance. I was also referred to seek out the topic online in the Autism Internet Modules for assistance.</td>
<td>This being my first FBA, I was unsure on how to take data. This student has a range of behaviors that fall into the high magnitude disruption category. It was difficult to determine which behavior to focus on. I will need to decide which form will provide an accurate snapshot of the behaviors that is easily recorded and what methods to use to make this effective. (PPTs 1, 2, 4)</td>
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Figure 11 Planning Phase Kimberly
### Interactive Phase

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I contacted transportation to for zip code coverage for ESY Mandarin Oaks Elementary.</td>
<td>I felt conflicted on how to approach this subject. As a professional, I knew the students in question had deficits although of varying degree. I knew the school principal would not be happy to have more work put upon the grade level teacher to meet the needs of the students. One student parents&quot; are asking for retention to begin him at the beginning of the year for inclusion for certain subjects. I learned that this is difficult to do and not recommended. As a parent I completely understand why they want to do this. This was something I did with my own children and it proved to be successful. (PPTs 1, 3, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I met with grade level teachers and there was a parent meeting with district personnel to discuss the motivation of inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to prove this student needed services and the meeting was successful.</td>
<td>I felt satisfied I was able to assist this student get the necessary services he needed to be successful. This child is on general education standards which writing is necessary. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I met with my site coach to discuss the data collecting process.</td>
<td>Collecting data is not my strong suit. This year it was particularly difficult because of the make-up of my class. I have others who needed FBA's and my attention was focused on keeping the flow of the classroom going with only one assistant, and having students meet their goals. Little room was left for anything else. (PPTs 1, 2, 4)</td>
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Figure 12 Interactive Phase Kimberly

### Reflective Phase

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<tr>
<th>Post Implementation</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom is still deliberating on how she can afford this</td>
<td>In the future, I will recommend students whether parents state whether their child will attend or not. I also want know more about their dilemma's they have getting exiting services for their child so I can at the very least provide a resource list for them and develop connections with these agencies/centers to assist my parents. (PPTs 1, 2, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This district did not approve the move. I was concerned and confused. The OT and I both agreed with the parent and their desire for inclusion.</td>
<td>I will need to better prepare parents for this type of meeting, making clear the all of the possible outcomes. (PPTs 1, 2, 3, 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other plans were successful.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Figure 13 Reflective Phase Kimberly

In the interactive phase (Figure 12), Kimberly is already feeling conflicted on the process and the interactions with district personnel and parents. Finally, the reflective phase (Figure 13) displays the tension between the decision that was made regarding the potential inclusion setting for her student and Kimberly’s PPT #2 and 4:

- Students are provided a means to communicate their needs and wants and we must ensure parent collaboration.
- Students should feel successful in and out of the classroom

Kimberly stated that because she was a full-time mother of three boys with autism, her PPTs did not change with her change in role to teacher.

**Patricia.** Patricia is a 40-45 year old female working as a CSS support specialist for Caroline County School District. She currently supports eight different CSS sites, which includes 45 CSS classrooms. She has spent her entire career working for Caroline County. She has a degree in mentally handicapped K-12 and a master’s degree in special education disability services. She has spent time as a paraprofessional, a CSS teacher for ten years, and site coach for seven years before becoming a program specialist. Patricia defines her role as one of support to the administrators, site coaches, and teachers serving students with autism and related disabilities. She described the five things she feels especially good about in her career as the opportunities she was given as a paraprofessional, her ability to make the challenging situations count while in the classroom, having supportive and collaborative colleagues, her ability to maintain a positive outlook, and making a difference in the lives of children. Patricia’s PPT from the workbook are defined as follows:
Table 6

*Personal Practical Theories as Defined by Patricia*

---

**THEORY 1:** Parity for students with disabilities.
Students with disabilities are entitled to the same supports, services and resources as those students served in general education classes.

**THEORY 2:** All teachers need varied levels of support.
The expectations for teachers should be to continually be on a path of learning and trying new interventions and methodologies for their students.

**THEORY 3:** Self-reflection is an opportunity to learn and should happen frequently.
Many educators don’t actively use self-reflection as a tool to drive the decision or problem solving process.

**THEORY 4:** Judgment and assumptions are common in education.
A focus on objective problem solving and professionalism need to be required through annual trainings.

**THEORY 5:** Life lessons build character but mentoring and support are necessary for success in education. College does not prepare future teachers for the rigor and pressure of today’s educational settings.

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Patricia’s experiences and career choices were influenced by having a younger sister with Down’s syndrome. She described this experience:

I was raised by a single mom for the bulk of, probably until high school, so I was essentially a second mom. Which was fun sometimes and not so fun sometimes. So, I had that responsibility to help get her ready in the morning, I had to help get her prepared at night, which was a big responsibility (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).
She reported these experiences have made her more understanding and empathetic to families. Patricia also stated that her life experiences and her experiences as a parent have influenced her choices. When describing the difficulty her own son has experienced with an auditory learning processing disorder she stated:

It’s been humbling in understanding that parents have different experiences and that I need to draw from what my experiences have been in order to understand parents. And the reverse of that knowing that I need to be sympathetic to other children and realize the severity of some of the disabilities (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

She further described how her experience as a parent has led her to a greater understanding of job as a mentor and role model:

I feel like working with the younger teachers today, they dismiss the idea of empathy or lack the perspective of understanding what another parent might go through. Why parents do what they do or why kids do what they do. I think in order to help them put it in perspective, we have to brainstorm with them or collaborate with them. Because just left on their own, a group of young people are going to react totally differently had they had another mature adult role model there who had a little more grounded ideas (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Her formal theory influences are Vygotsky and Piaget who both theorize on the importance of children having peer models and Social Learning Theory that emphasizes the importance of a team approach to learning and collaboration.
She describes her role in providing support for teachers as varied. She stated, “Our newer teachers require a lot more hands on and more frequent support compared to some of our seasoned teachers. I think the new teachers, although college prepares you for most pieces of teaching, there are so many other pieces they don’t get.” (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Patricia further described the specific needs of new teachers working with students with disabilities and their families:

They are coming out with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) already, they are coming out with more knowledge of assessments and what it means to look at data, generically speaking. They are coming out with more heightened awareness of disabilities and what the characteristics are, but their instructional methodologies, their behavior management, their effective communication with parents is significantly lower than where it needs to be (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Patricia described the importance of team collaboration, especially when working with students with disabilities. Although she admitted to having her own struggles with collaborating as a new teacher, she recognizes the value of teachers working together to share ideas: “I think those teams that collaborate are more successful. Today’s groups that work collaboratively together come up with some really good ideas and are open to being more collaborative with other district people like myself.” (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

The external influences that Patricia finds challenging are providing necessary supports for inclusion students and teachers, administration and money. She described one incident where
the inclusion teacher really struggled with the flexibility necessary to teach a student with disabilities:

This teacher did not have a token economy system in place for a little person; he was a kindergartner going into first grade. She didn’t want to change her classroom behavior management plan. She didn’t see the need for individual reinforcement. She didn’t see the need for increased frequency of reinforcement. So, I went in and modeled for her what it should look like. I bought the materials, brought the things to go with it. She watched me and said it was good, but it wasn’t something she could do or follow through with…the teacher next door willingly took what I gave her and made some other things on her own (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Further she described additional problems with trying to help inclusion teachers understand the specific needs of students with disabilities. When explaining a recent situation where Patricia had to move a student into a different classroom, she stated,

So when I entered this situation all of the things would have normally been done in previous years, because you had to do A, B, and C, had not been done. The behavior had gotten worse and he was not benefitting, he was not getting anything (from the inclusion setting). She (the teacher) was just not kind and wasn’t willing. It’s really not going to benefit me to go back and insist that they make changes because she’s not going to do them effectively and unfortunately his needs outweighed
her attitude. So, although I would be reinforcing her inappropriate behavior, I had to look in the long run and it’s going to benefit him even more (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Unfortunately in this situation, the student was moved to a more restrictive environment. Patricia explained her understanding of the situation in the following:

> By the time we were involved she was already calling people about supervisors and the union. That just tells me again though, and I’m trying to be positive and objective, she was passed the point of her emotional acceptance, knowledge and understanding…So I can’t expect you to go above and beyond when you emotionally can’t. What was the point if she had already given up, then I tend to look at the student. I did not agree with the recommendation. I did not recommend moving to self-contained. I made a recommendation to move to a less restrictive setting, but I was overruled (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

When asked if ultimately the teacher’s refusal to work with the child impacted his rights, Patricia explained: “It did. But then the reverse is true; it impacted her rights. Which I guess under our union contract she has rights, too” (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Looking at Patricia’s PPTs through the Naturalistic Model lens, in the planning phase (Figure 14), Patricia plans to help CSS sites implement the Quality Program Indicators (QPI) required by the district. This plan and deliberation aligns with Patricia’s PPTs:

- Parity for students with disabilities: Students with disabilities are entitled to the same supports, services and resources as those students served in general
education classes (1)

- All teachers need varied levels of support: The expectation for teachers should be to continually be on a path of learning and trying new interventions and methodologies for their students (2).

Patricia is also assisting staff in writing intervention plans for students, which aligns with PPT 1 and 2 as well as 5:

- Life lessons build character, but mentoring and support are necessary for success in education: College does not prepare future teachers for rigor and pressure of today’s educational settings (5).

Next, Patricia is modeling interventions for teachers and assisting site coaches with leadership skills so they can also model interventions in the classroom. PPTs 2, 4 and 5 are demonstrated in this plan and deliberation:

- All teachers need varied levels of support: The expectation for teachers should be to continually be on a path of learning and trying new interventions and methodologies for their students (2)

- Judgment and assumptions are common in education: A focus on objective problem solving and professionalism need to be required through annual trainings (4)

- Life lessons build character, but mentoring and support are necessary for success in education: College does not prepare future teachers for rigor and pressure of today’s educational settings (5).

Finally, Patricia works to increase administrator training regarding CSS by providing helpful
websites. Figure 15 details the interactive phase and Patricia’s goal to collaborate with teachers and site coaches to ensure the QPI is followed and make recommendations for possible improvements. Finally, the reflective phase (Figure 16) describes the tension Patricia feels when she realizes the training needed is greater than anticipated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning Phase</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use the QPI and school site feedback forms to share information with staff about possible areas of focus.</strong></td>
<td>Research articles for interventions or target behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assist staff in writing an intervention plans for 2 students</strong></td>
<td>Look up websites that offer more ideas interventions (PPTs 1, 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continue to model interventions for teachers.</strong></td>
<td>Look through previous text and class materials to for more ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share websites for more ideas, information for students (sensory, visuals, social stories)</strong></td>
<td>School staff are not trained nor have tools for facilitating or coaching (PPTs 1, 2, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need to define the site position (coaching with leadership qualities but no evaluative focus; more power in coaching than being the “boss”, coach and then you are leading) (PPTs 2, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School administration needs more training regarding CSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School staff don’t appear pursue or investigate options or other interventions (PPTs 1, 2, 4, 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14 Planning Phase Patricia
The tension in Patricia’s deliberations lie in her realization that the CSS program will continue to...
struggle without the support of the district, administration, and site coaches. She describes this in her reflection: “Administration needs more training in understanding our students. Without their support the program continues to struggle and not sure how I can provide support to school staff in all the chaos” (Patricia, PPT Workbook). This shows conflict with her PPT #1, 2, 4, and 5.

Overall, Patricia reported she was satisfied with her findings and although her PPTs did not align with her decision-making in this situation, she is working hard to make positive changes. When asked what the solution for increasing administration and teacher training might be, Patricia believes it involves motivation:

You really don’t take training unless you’re somewhat motivated by it.

Chances are you’re not going to go back and do it (in the classroom).

All the trainings we do, unless you’re really in the moment needing to use it, people aren’t inclined to do it. They just aren’t (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Patricia stated her PPTs may have slightly changed with her role change within the district, however she believes most of her beliefs and theories come from personal experiences so they constantly evolve.

The theories across the study

After developing their PPTs through the workbook and completing their initial interview, the participants were asked to review the workbook and transcript and make changes if needed. None of the participants made changes. Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process for thematic analysis, the researcher analyzed the data, searching for themes and patterns. The themes were
reviewed and refined, defined and named, and examples were taken from interview data to support the final selection. Table 7 shows eight common themes directly related to the participant’s thinking and discussions of their Personal Practical Theories and how they related to working with students with disabilities. These themes include care for students and families, safety of students, administration and teacher professional development, ensuring high expectations for students, personal and professional advocacy, mentoring and collaboration, reflection and problem solving, and problems with inclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>PPTs</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Coach/Leader</td>
<td>Site Coach</td>
<td>1. Individual needs of students and families are a top priority</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>2. Advocate for families; empathy for needs and challenges</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESE Certified</td>
<td>3. Make careful decisions, they have lasting effects on students, coworkers, and families</td>
<td>Reflection and Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20+ Years Experience</td>
<td>4. Collaboration is key</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Set high expectations</td>
<td>High Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson/Leader</td>
<td>CSS District Specialist</td>
<td>1. There should be a measurable and observable goal of what students are to learn</td>
<td>High Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>2. There should be an expectations that all students will be successful to a degree that is appropriate for them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>3. Teachers must be well trained and knowledgeable of what they are to teach and methods on how to teach it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESE Certified</td>
<td>4. Every student should be respected and cared for and given a fun and engaging learning environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10+ Years Experience</td>
<td>5. Time should be taken to</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Yazmine       | Teacher     | CSS 1st-5th Teacher                           | Bachelor’s Degree ESE Certified 3+ Years Experience | 1. I must love what I do. 2. The students are the priority. I am doing what I do for the students. They should feel loved and safe. Working as a team with my colleagues will increase the chances for student success 3. I must be open-minded to learning from my colleagues, friends, family, students, and parents. Continual professional development is essential 4. I believe in standing up for what is right, especially for my students. They should be treated fairly and respectfully 5. Preparation and careful planning are important, but so are flexibility and the ability to adapt to unexpected changes. | Care, Safety, and Inclusion  
Collaboration and Professional Development  
Advocacy |
| Kimberly      | Teacher     | CSS Pre-K- 1st Grade Teacher                   | Bachelor’s Degree ESE Certified 3+ Years Experience | 1. The safety of every student is a priority 2. Students are provided a means to communicate their needs and wants. Parent collaboration is essential 3. Continue to provide current best practice instruction 4. Students should feel successful in and out of the classroom 5. I want my students to know I care about their overall well-being. They are children first and should be treated as such | Care and Safety  
Self-Advocacy  
Professional Development  
High Expectations  
Care |
| Patricia      | Leader      | CSS Specialist                                  | Master’s Degree                                  | 1. Parity for student with disabilities: Students                                                                 | Advocacy |
| ESE Certified  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20+ Years Experience</th>
<th>with disabilities are entitled to the same supports, services, and resources as those served in general education classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. All teachers need varied levels of support: The expectation for teachers should be to continually be on a path of learning and trying new interventions and methodologies for their students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self reflection is an opportunity to learn and should happen frequently: Many educators do not actively use self-reflection as a tool to drive in the decision or problem solving process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Judgment and assumptions are common in education: A focus on objective problem solving and professionalism need to be required through annual trainings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Life lessons build character, but mentoring and support are necessary for success in education: College does not prepare future teachers for rigor and pressure of today's educational settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Collaboration and Inclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Themes Across Participants

**Care for students and families.** Four of the five participants (including the researcher) listed care for students and families as one of their PPTs. The researcher listed the individual needs of students and families as a top priority. Participants also recognized the importance of
care. For example, in addition to listing care and respect as a PPT in his workbook, in his interview Jackson mentions the importance of caring for the individual needs of students several times. When asked about how he originally developed his PPTs, he stated:

You have to look at some of the things that you think are important and once you think about them more, you realize it’s related to something else and you see a similarity between those: Such as the pure respect and care of children. That I think is an important one. And what that entails is a lot of structure in the classroom and that stuff goes back to respecting the children and their need (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Similarly, in her interview Yazmine made the connection between her PPT and actions when she described her upbringing as the foundation for developing a loving and caring attitude towards others:

I definitely got a good foundation from them (her parents) as far as how to be loving towards others and kind. It’s what I expect others to do, especially toward our students…Christianity is basically loving, being loving toward others, whether it’s your colleagues or your students (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Kimberly expressed the importance of care for students and families in her PPT as well as her interview when she described her home visits:

If they allow me to come in, I’m there. Probably more than they want me to be. But yeah, I do home visits. If someone is having a birthday
party, I show up. That is one of my PPTs. It’s not just at school (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

The above participants and researcher pointed to care and respect for children and families as central to their beliefs regarding their work with students with disabilities.

**Safety of students.** The two classroom teachers focused on the safety of students in their PPTs. The increased face-to-face interactions with their students on a daily basis may be the reason for their increased awareness of the importance of safety. The researcher or the two district staff did not specifically mention safety in their PPT workbook or interviews. Yazmine combined student care and safety in the same PPT, however she refers to safety several times throughout her interview. In response to a question regarding the fact that she often gives up lunch to remain with the students, she commented:

One of my kids was having a tough day already, so instead of me leaving for lunch I decided to stay there in the cafeteria just to make sure everything was ok... just in case we had to take one of the kids out, I was right there (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Likewise, Kimberly reported the safety of every student as a top priority in her PPTs. She makes clear her role in providing a safe environment when she stated:

Parents send their children out the door to school to be entrusted with someone for seven hours a day. That is their most precious thing. And we have to take care of it; we have to take care of their child. I know that there is no way I would send my child out the door if I felt they weren’t safe. Even if they were hurting themselves. I need to do
thing to make sure they (the parents) feel the same way about their
child. And it is non-negotiable (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Further, Yasmine and Kimberly must both consider the safety of their students when they
develop and implement interventions necessary to improve disruptive behaviors. Both teachers
described the importance of putting interventions in place to decrease self-injurious and/or
aggressive behaviors.

**Administration and teacher professional development.** All four participants listed the
need for continued learning and professional development as a PPT. While the teachers
emphasized the need for personal professional development, the district staff further reported the
need for professional development for administration. Both of the district level staff, Jackson
and Patricia, spoke of the need for higher quality trainings that are more specific to working with
students with disabilities. Additionally, both worry it is difficult for administration to set high
expectations for ESE teachers and ensure accountability because many times they lack
knowledge regarding ESE students, the curriculum, and their needs. The need for administration
to have an awareness and knowledge of the needs of students in high incidence settings is
critical. Patricia explained in her interview:

> While I see the setting as dangerous for staff and students and nothing
> being done about it week after week. So I took the reins and did things
> probably above and beyond what I should have done. I did what I
> needed to do for the safety of the staff…Somebody new coming into
> these programs, you don’t have an understanding of the magnitude of
> what goes on; the underlying behind the scenes versus what you see
when you walk into the room (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

She furthers describes the possible reason for the lack of knowledge:

Generically speaking there are not as many people in ESE that are choosing to go into administration. So, with that you really are going to have people that are just not knowledgeable or make an effort or have the desire to learn. But, if you don’t have an ESE background and you’re not seeking it out it’s very hard for people to understand and put it together with what the expectations are and what they see in their general education classes. We have to want to see the same things and it’s just not like that. We need more ESE administrators, period (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

In contrast, the teacher participants specifically describe their need to participate in professional development in order to provide high quality, best practice instruction. For example, Yazmine reveals her desire to continually learn more about her craft: “There are things that I do well, but I still have a lot of work to do” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). Kimberly elaborated: “…the more I go to these professional development courses the more I realize, “oh, I didn’t know that!” I need to stay on top of those best practices” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015). Further she stated, “Best practices, those workshops. I’m loving it! I love the fact the county provides that information. I love access to a plethora of different resources we can use” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015). The need for continued and improved professional development for both teachers and administrators may offer implications for future research to be discussed in the next chapter.
Ensuring high expectations for students. Two participants and the researcher listed setting high expectations for students as a PPT, however this theme was revealed throughout three of the interviews. In the interview with Jackson, he stated “Setting high expectations for student success in non-negotiable because every student can do something. And, if you don’t have that expectation then chances are they won’t progress” (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015). The researcher listed setting high expectations because of her experiences working with students with disabilities and the success she has witnessed when expectations were raised. Similarly, Kimberly said the students need to feel successful and that they can achieve their goals. She mentions that people often assume students with disabilities can’t complete difficult tasks or may not be aware of their surroundings:

A lot of people don’t thing he (one of the students) is, but he is very aware. He needs a lot of verbal encouragement to complete learned tasks. He knows he knows it, but he’s scared to say the answer. And if he’s overwhelmed, he acts out (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Yazmine described the expectation for student behavior when she stated:

Even though we have challenging behaviors, we still expect our kids to behave. You know, we don’t excuse them for it. They may need help as far as calming, but there are certain behaviors we still expect. We expect them to be respectful of us as the adults, of their peers in the classroom and of the other staff in the classrooms (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Advocacy. In this study, advocacy is shown through professional advocacy as well as
teaching self-advocacy skills to students. All five participants listed advocacy as a PPT and/or spoke of it in the interviews. Jackson discussed the value of being an advocate for students with disabilities when he stated:

This is hugely important to our kids because they don’t have a voice or a way to express their desire for these things, or maybe even the knowledge to know they need them and deserve them. And I think that’s the biggest thing because our kids, often times, cannot be their greatest advocate because that is part of their disability is that they may not understand it, they may not realize it, they may not even know it’s available for them to advocate for it (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Jackson also mentioned the importance of teaching self-advocacy skills to students in the classroom setting; being constantly aware of their need to function socially, gain as much independence as possible, and meet their own needs with as little adult guidance as is appropriate. Furthermore, Patricia described her role as an advocate and the frustration she often feels:

We are very aware of what the low incidence programs are being faced with in terms of increased numbers, appropriate placement, appropriate settings, and meeting those needs. And they’ve (the district) has been aware and they’ve given generously and listened to feedback and have made suggestions. More currently though it’s been taking resources away, not totally listening to what our needs are. There is not parody. We do not have the same access to trainings, we do not have the same
materials, we don’t have the same amount of money that they (general education) do in terms of accessing resources and technology. I’s not always a priority. I don’t think that is the focus of the district, unfortunately (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

Yazmine defined one of her PPTs as standing up for what is right for her students and ensuring they are treated fairly and respectfully. This includes frequently communicating with parents to check on the behaviors and/or concerns at home and ensuring equal success at home and school. She stated, “How can we reward them here at school when they have a good night or morning at home?” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015). She further identified her need to increase her professional advocacy for her students at school:

I need to be a little more vocal as far as maybe with the school and the administration as far as our kids to make sure our kids are treated fairly and they get what they need. That they are included (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

When asked which PPT was the most important to her, Kimberly was steadfast in her answer:

That they are children first. I feel stronger about that because I see the politics of the school system. I can see how a child or family could get lost in that, and not to bash, but the considerations for any child should be made based on the fact that they are children versus a diagnosis (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015).

This aligns with the data from the planning, interactive, and reflective phases of the decision-making model for each participant, where the needs of individual students were the priority.
**Mentoring and collaboration.** Yazmine, Patricia, and the researcher all listed collaboration as a PPT, while Kimberly and Jackson referred to the importance of this in their interviews. When asked where they find their support, Kimberly and Yazmine both responded they depend on support from colleagues, more experienced teachers, district staff, and administrators, however they also mentioned time constraints was a challenge. In their roles, Jackson and Patricia both stated they realized the importance of providing support to teachers, modeling, and collaborating with administration and teachers to make the program better for students. It is not without challenges as Patricia described:

> Across settings, across the years, there have been people that didn’t want to work collaboratively, be it directly with me as a teacher or as a site coach…the door would be locked when I would go and they would just look at me. So, I would just wave and say, “I’ll be back tomorrow.”

(Patricia, Interview, May 9, 2015).

Although it may be difficult to ensure collaboration within teams, all of the participants spoke of the importance and need for increased teamwork and cooperation. The participants who were district staff stated in their experience, the units within schools that worked together successfully had more effective teachers and student success. Further research in this area may be needed and will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Reflective problem solving.** The district staff and the researcher listed reflective problem solving as a PPT. This higher degree of reflection may come from their supervisory roles within schools. Patricia related an episode of a popular television show to her view of reflection. In the episode, a witch is flying overhead watching what is happening below.
Patricia described this:

So, it was her in the moment looking back in time at what did I do wrong and what could I have done differently. I often use that as an example when I do trainings and say you need to go back as best you can and think about what you said, what you did, what your body language said. You need to go back and reflect on what happened a couple of times because the first time you may be emotional about it, the second time you may be mad about it. It’s going to evoke a lot of emotions clearly because it probably wasn’t successful and that’s why you’re reflecting on it (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015).

This scenario also characterized Jackson’s views on the importance of reflective problem solving, especially when it comes to implementing behavioral interventions. He stated that he’s learned through reflecting on previous experiences with interventions:

I found that if you implement an intervention and there is not a positive effect almost immediately, I find a lot of people give up on it. So, I have to find something that is quickly noticeable…and try to pair that with something else that has more of a long term change (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

Both teachers spoke of the importance of reflecting on their practice in their interviews.

Kimberly acknowledged, “I don’t do it as much as I should. I am very grateful for the time I do reflect because it reminds me of what I am doing and why I am doing it” (Kimberly, Interview, May 9, 2015). Further, Yazmine reported the importance of reflecting with her coworkers and
site coach to help improve instruction, “We talk about what we can do differently or what went well...if this happened, what if we tried this?” (Yazmine, Interview, April 3, 2015).

Problems with inclusion. Both Jackson and Patricia noted their difficulty as district specialists in ensuring students with disabilities who are placed in inclusion settings receive the services they need as well as fair treatment. In both of their described experiences, they chose the fair and ethical treatment of the child over the child’s least restrictive environment. For example, in describing her decision-making, Patricia stated, “I made a recommendation to move to a less restrictive setting, but I was overruled. I wanted to try the less restrictive setting with the interventions I created, but I was overruled” (Patricia, Interview, May 8, 2015). The lack of understanding of ESE students may prevent the general education teachers from accepting the challenge of having a student with an IEP. As a site coach, the researcher has worked with inclusion teachers at the elementary and middle school level and has experienced both a willingness to work hard for the student as well as a refusal to teach a student with an IEP. In the planning, interactive, and reflective phases of the workbook, the researcher had a positive experience in moving a student from a low incidence setting into full inclusion. However, Kimberly was not successful in moving her student to the general education setting. All of the participants acknowledged the difficulty in students being completely accepted in a general education setting and all of the participants stated it was partially due to lack of training and knowledge and partially due to lack of acceptance. As Jackson stated:

I’ll find teachers that really want to try and really want to learn, but no matter how hard they try they cannot implement the stuff consistently or the right way and it doesn’t work out. Or, I’ll find teachers that
absolutely hate it, hate the idea, they don’t want to give it a chance and they only do it when they are forced to (by the administration) (Jackson, Interview, April 9, 2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Jackson</th>
<th>Yazmine</th>
<th>Kimberly</th>
<th>Patricia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care for Students and Families</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Safety of Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher and Administration Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring High Expectations for Students</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Problem Solving</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problems with Inclusion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Comparison of Themes

Table 8 shows a comparison of themes across participants. Each participant was asked to identify five non-negotiable, personal practical theories for the purpose of this research. While all of the themes may be important to the participants, the table shows which theme each participant identified. The themes were coded by the researcher, however each participant agreed with the coding. The differences may be a result of how the participants were socialized or differences based on their role within the district.

Table 9 shows how these themes are related, their purpose/intent and the possible
outcomes for student learning. Care for students, safety, and professional advocacy all focus on environmental factors and attending to the needs of students with disabilities to provide positive interactions and facilitate student growth and success academically and socially. Professional development, mentoring and collaboration, and reflective practice calls attention to the need for educators to increase their knowledge and become more reflective in their practice. This will help increase student achievement by deepening the understanding of the complex needs of ESE students and teachers and improve instructional practices. Ensuring high expectation, problems with inclusion, and teaching self-advocacy to students calls attention to the need to increase the opportunities for students with disabilities to spend more time in full inclusion classes with typically developing peers and to learn skills to become more independent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Purpose/Intent</th>
<th>Outcomes for Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Care for Students&lt;br&gt; • Safety&lt;br&gt; • Advocacy (Professional)</td>
<td>Understanding and attending to the individual needs of students and families</td>
<td>Safe environments&lt;br&gt; Positive student/family interactions&lt;br&gt; Facilitate student growth academically and socially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher and Administration Professional Development&lt;br&gt; • Mentoring and Collaboration&lt;br&gt; • Reflective Problem Solving</td>
<td>Help individuals grow as professionals and become more reflective in their practice</td>
<td>Increased student achievement&lt;br&gt; Deepened understanding of the complex needs of ESE students&lt;br&gt; Improved instructional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring High Expectations for Students&lt;br&gt; • Problems with Inclusion&lt;br&gt; • Advocacy (Self)</td>
<td>Increasing student performance and opportunities for independent functioning and inclusion with typically developing peers</td>
<td>Increase opportunities for independent functioning, communication and social interactions&lt;br&gt; Improve self-advocacy skills&lt;br&gt; Work toward improving inclusion settings with typically developing peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 Relationship of Themes

This chapter’s focus was to develop a greater understanding of each participant and how their PPTs influence their decision-making. Each participant chose a decision they had made during a week and examined it through each phase of the process; planning, interactive, and reflective. These decisions were then compared to their PPTs and checked for alignment. Tensions arose when decision-making did not align with stated PPTs. Across all cases the participants explained the development of their PPTs; the scope of which included care for students and families, safety of students, administration and teacher professional development, ensuring high expectations for students, personal and professional advocacy, mentoring and collaboration, reflection and problem solving, and problems with inclusion. In the remaining chapter, these personal practical theories will be examined and the need for improved, high quality professional development and training for teachers and administrators working with ESE students and ways to increase collaboration among teams within ESE departments.
CHAPTER 5

The intent of this study was to examine exceptional student educators’ personal practical theories and how they manifest in practice. The study shows distinct differences among the participants’ PPTs. However, many commonalities exist among their personal theories, how they developed, and how they impact practice. Their theories, developed through personal and practical experiences, were influenced by family backgrounds, formal theory, and their personal beliefs about persons with disabilities.

Using Huberman and Miles (2002) and Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestions for organizing and coding data, data collection using the PPT workbook, and in-depth interviews, themes were identified showing common PPTs and how they impact teacher and administrator decision-making. These themes included care for students and families, safety of students, administration and teacher professional development, ensuring high expectations for students, personal and professional advocacy, mentoring and collaboration, and reflection and problem solving. These findings contribute to a greater understanding of ESE teacher and leader PPTs and how they impact decision-making.

**Theoretical Framework**

Cornett’s (1990) Model for Analysis of the Impact of Teacher Personal Practical Theories on the Curricular and Instructional Decision Making of Teachers (Figure 1) served as a framework to investigate the relationships between teachers’ and leaders’ defined personal practical theories, external influences, and the planning, implementation, and reflective phases of decision-making in regards to their work with students with disabilities. The participants used the model’s workbook to describe their personal theories, the formal theory influences, personal
influences, and a week’s decision making. They looked at decisions through the lenses of the planning, interactive, and reflective phases of the process and ultimately aligned these decisions with their described PPTs. In this naturalistic leadership model a teacher and leaders’ decision-making is deliberate and practical. Decision-making is based on their PPTs (E) which are influenced by their planning (B), interactions with human, material, temporal, and content (C), reflection (D) as well as outside factors that are beyond their control (F). In this research project, the model was tested and the process produced PPTs for all participants, themes were developed, implications for the findings are discussed, and recommendations for future research are made.

Methodology

Four participants were chosen for this study using purposive sampling. One early childhood teacher, one secondary teacher and two district level instructional program specialists were selected. All participants worked with exceptional students in Pre-K-12 in the Caroline County School District. The participants were chosen based on their years of experience, level of expertise, and role in working with students with disabilities. Further, the participants were chosen based on their knowledge of special education and whether they were considered highly qualified according to No Child Left Behind. As a site coach for a large ESE department, the researcher trusted that her own experience and knowledge would provide additional insight and understanding into the rewards and challenges facing ESE teachers.

The participants, Jackson, Yazmine, Kimberly, and Patricia (all pseudonyms), had varying levels of classroom experiences and different roles within the district at the time of the study. Jackson had been teaching for three years, a site coach for four years, and working as a district specialist for three years. Patricia had ten years of teaching in a low incidence setting,
Yazmine and Kimberly were in their second and third year of teaching.

The researcher invited five participants to participate in the study and all five agreed. The researcher initially met with three of the participants to review the purpose of the study, guide them through the PPT workbook, explain the risk and benefits of participation in the study, and sign the informed consents. The other two participants met with the researcher individually to do the same. All questions regarding the study were answered and the participants were reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked. They were emailed a copy of chapters 1-3 of the study to review. Participants were individually called to check on their progress with the workbook and provide additional guidance if necessary. Some participants were very independent with this part of the process, while others needed more scaffolding. This scaffolding including meeting with two participants individually to review the workbook in more detail, specifically the page regarding formal theory influences and aligning the PPTs with each stated decision. These meetings were brief and participants were able complete the final workbook after assistance was given.

The researcher first met individually with one participant and contacted the other four via email to review the progress of the workbook. It was at this time that one participant dropped out of the study due to time constraints and the demands of the participant’s current position. The interviews began and field notes were taken during each interview. Each interview was approximately 1½ hours. Transcripts were completed and all participants were emailed a copy of their transcript to review. None of the participants had changes or concerns. Throughout this process, the researcher continued to meet with her advisor for peer debriefings.
To make the connection between PPTs and the findings of this research, the guiding research questions that led to these findings address are listed below.

1. What are the PPTs of ESE educators?
   a) Teachers
   b) Leaders

2. What factors influence the development of PPTs?
   a.) How do training, experience, and formal theory factor into the development of PPTs?
   b.) How do the ESE leaders and teachers’ perceptions of support within the district and school influence their PPTs?

3. Has a change in roles/responsibilities within the district impacted PPTs?

4. How do PPTs impact special educators’ work with students with disabilities?

5. How does reflective practice help in the refinement of ESE teachers PPTs?

These research questions guided the researcher in identifying teacher and leader beliefs about working with students with disabilities and their families, their source, and how they play a critical role in classroom practice and daily decision-making. Jackson, Yazmine, Kimberly, and Patricia’s PPTs, and the findings add to existing literature on teacher belief studies by illustrating the ways in which teacher beliefs impact their work with students with disabilities.
Research Questions

The results of this study included the PPTs of ESE teachers and leaders and eight major themes including care for students and families, safety of students, administration and teacher professional development, ensuring high expectations for students, personal and professional advocacy, mentoring and collaboration, reflection and problem solving, and problems with inclusion. These themes are related through their purpose and the possible outcomes for student learning and may have implications for educational leadership.

Factors Influencing the Development of PPTs

The factors influencing the development of PPTs varied, but focused on family, siblings or children with disabilities, professional mentors, spirituality, and other personal experiences. Participants reported being influenced by their practical teaching experiences as well as by training and professional development, personal experiences in and out of the classroom, and formal theory. The participants’ perceptions of support within the district and within their schools also impact their PPTs. All of the participants reported their perceptions of a lack of support from the district level and concern with administration’s lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the complexity of the needs of ESE teachers and students. While they did not place blame on the district or administration, the participants reported that they felt the district was understaffed and administrators were unaware of some of the specific needs of this population of students.

Changing roles/responsibilities impact on PPTs

Participants indicated changing roles and responsibilities within the district only slightly impacted PPTs. The district specialists reported their changing roles make them more aware of
the need for additional training, but ultimately their PPTs have not changed. The PPTs of the specialists may be more linear because of their responsibility to implement interventions, data collection, provide professional development and training, and ensure a student’s IEP is followed. In contrast, the PPTs of the teachers focused on their ability to care and advocate for their students.

**PPTs Impact on ESE Educators’ Work with Students with Disabilities**

PPTs impact teachers’ and leaders’ work with students with disabilities in that they provide the foundation for ethical decision-making. All participants reported their PPTs guided them in their daily decision-making and were reflected upon frequently. External influences certainly impact teachers’ and leaders’ final decisions, however PPTs influence the development of goals for students, their instructional practice in and out of the classroom, and how they interact and develop relationships with students and families.

**Reflective Practice in Refining PPTs**

Reflective practice was critical to all of the participants of this study. When asked if they felt the PPT development process was beneficial, all participants said yes. They reported the value of this process over the writing of their annual Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) required by the district. Both teachers in this study reported the PPT process required them to closely look at what they believed and whether these beliefs aligned with their decision-making. While the IPDP process requires the teachers and leaders to look at areas of need and find training to improve in this area, the PPT process requires the teachers/leaders to dig deep into their thinking and whether or not they are living by these stated non-negotiables.
Implications of the Findings

Attending to the needs of students with disabilities

Participants in this study reported understanding and attending to the needs of students and families was crucial to providing well-rounded, high quality instruction. The need for safe environments, positive student and family interactions, and facilitation of academic and social growth of students all help to ensure the individual needs of the students are met. Leaders and administrators may help facilitate this by ensuring they have knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of ESE teachers and students.

Increasing teacher and leader knowledge and reflective practice

Participants also reported the need for better teacher and leader professional development to help individuals grow as professionals and become more reflective in their practice as well as ensuring time for collaboration with colleagues. This professional development should focus on increasing student achievement while deepening the understanding of the complex needs of ESE teachers and their students. Leaders may participate in professional development that increases their knowledge of the specific needs of different populations of students, including those with disabilities. Leaders and administrators may also provide additional support to ESE teachers through mentoring beyond the first year of teaching and time for professional learning communities to collaborate in order to improve instructional practices. Further, leaders and administrators may consider adding the PPT development process as a supplement to the IPDP to increase the reflective practice of teachers and leaders.

Opportunities for students with disabilities to increase independence
The perception of the participants in this study was that emphasis should be placed on increasing the opportunities for inclusion of students with disabilities with their typically developing peers. These interactions may increase independence, communication, social interactions, and may help improve self-advocacy skills. With this comes the need for professional development for inclusion teachers in understanding the needs of individual students, differentiation of instruction, goal setting, and following IEPs. Leaders in education may provide enhanced opportunities for inclusion teachers to participate in professional development specific to providing for inclusion students.

Conclusions

The basis for this study was a gap in the research regarding any case studies of ESE teachers and leaders and their Personal Practical Theories and PPT impact on practice. This gap was identified by an extensive review of the literature related to the construction of worldviews, reflective practice, teacher personal and practical theories, and the challenges facing ESE teachers. Through this review, the researcher found the need for research in the area of the Personal Practical Theories of ESE educators and their implications for practice. The researcher sought to find how ESE teachers and leaders maintain their commitment to such a difficult job. Specifically, how do ESE teachers and leaders beliefs about teaching students with disabilities impact their teaching practices and decision-making? This collective case study included two ESE teachers and two ESE district specialists as participants.

Each participant engaged in completing a PPT workbook and an in-depth interview, which served as the primary data to be analyzed for this research study because they appropriately addressed the research questions concerning teacher beliefs and their impact on
decision-making. Most importantly, this study shows the need for further research in the areas of providing high quality professional development for administrators and special educators, increased training for inclusion teachers, and the potential for using PPT development to increase reflective practice.

Limitations of the Study

The findings for this study, presented in chapter IV, have been influenced by a set of limitations. The first limitation has to do with the small, purposive sample. Participants were chosen based on their level of expertise, specifically receiving their autism endorsement from the state of Florida and K-12 ESE certification as well as their role in working with students with disabilities either as a teacher or leader. Selected participants were highly reflective based on previous interactions and observations by the researcher and were willing to disclose knowledge that may enhance ESE education. The participants may not be representative of ESE teachers and leaders due to the fact that they were selected because they were highly qualified based on the standards set forth by NCLB. The PPT development process could be used with administrators and ESE and general education teachers to strengthen the reflective process, however additional scaffolding may be necessary based on the needs of the individuals. In the current study, all four participants needed additional scaffolding relating PPTs to formal theory. PPTs may be strengthened when grounded in formal theory because individuals can use formal theory to either support or challenge assumptions.

Second was the researcher’s lack of time and access to people within the district to determine if a change in role/responsibility had an impact on PPTs. While the participants of this study stated a change in role did not change their PPTs, further exploration on the subject is
needed to see if a pattern exists between changing roles/responsibilities and PPTs.

For the current research project, the researcher did not do an inventory of the in-service opportunities provided to the participants. The researcher can only report the perceptions of the participants that current in-service does not work as well as the PPT process to enhance self-reflection practices. Further research may track the development of teachers and leaders self-reflection through in-service participation.

Another limitation of the study is that the researcher did not conduct direct observations of the participants. Direct observations of the participants in their classrooms would allow the researcher to collect data and field notes that would provide more rich descriptions of the participants’ teaching practices, interactions with students and colleagues, and reactions to everyday events in ESE classrooms.

Finally, the researcher realizes the findings are limited in that they only reflect the beliefs and theories of the five ESE educators who participated. Other ESE teachers and ESE leaders as well as administrators and general education educators’ perceptions are not taken into consideration in this study and may be significantly different from the themes described here. It is recommended this PPT process be implemented throughout the district in order to get a clear understanding of the thoughts, beliefs, and theories of all in the district who may interact with students with disabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, high quality professional development for administrators, leaders, and ESE teachers should be a focus. Professional development that is motivating and increases the understanding of the specific needs of ESE students and teachers is
needed. The perceptions of the participants of this study are that administrators are often unaware of student needs when it comes to scheduling, advocating for inclusion, parent concerns, classroom curriculum and behaviors.

This study also found an increased need for ESE training for inclusion teachers. With more students with IEPs being educated in the general education setting, teachers without ESE training need to be prepared for the rigor of IEP compliance and data collection, behavioral interventions, and differentiation of instruction.

Further, the reflective practice process needs to be strengthened for teachers and leaders. According to the perceptions of the participants, the development, refinement, and reflection of alignment in the PPT process generates more reflection and self-improvement than what is currently in place in the IPDP. The PPT process can work in conjunction with or replace the current annual Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) required by all teachers CCSD. This plan is designed to encourage teachers to reflect on their current practices and base their professional development plans on their strengths and weaknesses. The plan uses student data to help guide the teachers in setting yearly goals, however not much emphasis is placed on deeper reflection of practice. While the development and refinement of PPTs would require training and possible scaffolding, ultimately it empowers the teachers and leaders to refine their thinking and theories in order to ensure their beliefs align with their instructional practices. This should happen often and honestly.

An interesting discovery of this study was the different language used by the participants when describing their PPTs. The teachers and leaders with more experience tended to use stronger, non-judgmental language whereas teachers and leaders newer to the field used
language that seemed to look for more guidance. For example, the researcher and Patricia, both with 20+ years of experience, defined their PPTs using words such as “are” and “have” while Jackson and Yazmine used words such as “should”. This difference in grammatical mood may lead to additional studies that look at the differences between teachers and leaders at different stages of their careers and how their beliefs and theories change with experience and time.

In closing, ultimately the results of the current study inspire the researcher to maximize exposure of the PPT process through new ESE teacher education programs such as the pre-service community-based transformational learning program at the University of North Florida as well as teacher in-service and administrator professional development within the district.

**Implications for Future Research**

During this research, questions arose that require further investigation. Specifically, how can districts create and carry out high quality professional development that increases the awareness of the specific needs of ESE teachers and students for administrators and special educators?

Also, do inclusion teachers who work with students in a general education classroom need additional training to prepare them for the challenges of working with students with disabilities?

Finally, can schools use the study and analysis of PPTs to help teachers and administrators increase their understanding of their practices and how their PPTs impact decision-making?
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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Title of Research: Examination of Perceptions of Exceptional Student Educators Personal Practical Theories and the Implications for Practice

Principal Investigator: Melissa Call

Department: Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Sports Management

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between ESE leader and educator’s actions as evidenced by their Personal Practical Theories (PPTs). This study is significant because ESE teachers play a major role in helping families receive services, set learning goals, and monitor progress of special needs students. Additionally, ESE teachers’ attitudes and worldviews regarding their students can work to help combat the social discrimination facing students with disabilities. Society’s treatment of persons with disabilities has been mixed; ESE teachers can help ensure fair and equitable treatment of their students. The development and refinement of PPTs is critical to an ESE teacher’s ability to make ethical decisions regarding his/her students and their families, help combat social discrimination, and ensure appropriate learning is taking place. This study will contribute to teacher and administrator practice in making educational decisions for students with disabilities and advocating for families.

Participants will participate in a data collection process involving defining their Personal Practical Theories (PPTs) using a PowerPoint workbook designed by Cornett (1987). After PPTs have been defined, the participants will participate in a semi-structured interview designed to explore their PPTs, their educational practices related to their PPTs, how their PPTs have changed over the years and through their experiences, outside forces impacting their PPTs, and evaluate their alignment between PPTs and their decision making.

Procedures to be followed

1. As a prospective participant you were initially contacted e-mail in order to determine your level of interest in participation.

2. During a follow-up phone call you verbally agreed to be part of the study and we arranged a date and time for you to attend a face-to-face meeting to discuss the data collection process.

3. During our initial meeting I will explain the project and provide you with a consent form.
You will be asked to sign the consent form indicating your willingness to allow your interview to be utilized for the purposes of this research study.

4. If you give consent you agree to participate in the data collection process as well as a one-on-one semi-structured interview that will last no more than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

**Duration of subject’s participation**

You will agree to participate in a one-on-one interview. In addition, you may be asked, over the next 6 months, to participate in a follow-up conversation/interview.

**Risks and Discomforts**

There are minimal risks in this study. As a participant in this study, you may feel inadequate in your practice after developing and reviewing their PPTs, especially if you find your PPTs do not align with your practice. However, the risk is outweighed by the benefits.

**Benefits**

The benefits of participating in the PPT process are improved practice and greater awareness of the alignment between theories and action. Additionally, your input may add to the literature and knowledge base of thoughts and actions of exceptional student educators. This knowledge can help improve teacher preparation programs, professional development, and provision of services for families.

**Confidentiality and Records**

All materials, including PPT PowerPoint data, computer tape recordings, interview transcripts, and field notes will be stored on a password protected, secure server. Interviews will be recorded on the researcher’s password protected, personal computer. After the transcription process, the recordings will be destroyed. When the dissertation is published, all identities will be obscured.

I will maintain complete confidentiality of responses and participant names.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

**Primary Researcher:**
Melissa Call
Phone:
Email:

**Dissertation Committee Chair:**
Dr. Jeffrey Cornett  
University of North Florida  
Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Sports Management  
1 UNF Drive  
Jacksonville, FL 32224  
Phone:  
Email:

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature: __________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________

Printed Name: ________________________________________
APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 16, 2014

TO: Ms. Melissa Call

VIA: Dr. Richard Chant
    College of Education

FROM: Dr. Jennifer Wesely, Chairperson
    On behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Declaration of Exempt Status for IRB#682780-1:
    “Examinations of Perceptions of Exceptional Student Educators Personal Practical Theories and
    the Implications for Practice”

Your project, “Examinations of Perceptions of Exceptional Student Educators Personal Practical Theories and
the Implications for Practice” was reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and declared
“Exempt” category 2. Based on the recently revised Standard Operating Procedures regarding exempt projects,
the UNF IRB no longer reviews and approves exempt research according to the 45 CFR 46 regulations. Projects
declared exempt review are only reviewed to the extent necessary to confirm exempt status.

Once data collection under the exempt status begins, the researchers agree to abide by these requirements:

- All investigators and co-investigators, or those who obtain informed consent, collect data, or have access
to identifiable data are trained in the ethical principles and federal, state, and institutional policies
governing human subjects research (please see the FAQs on UNF IRB CITI Training for more
information).
- An informed consent process will be used, when necessary, to ensure that participants voluntarily
consent to participate in the research and are provided with pertinent information such as identification
of the activity as research, a description of the procedures, right to withdraw at any time, risks, and
benefits; and contact information for the PI and IRB chair.
- Human subjects will be selected equitably so that the risks and benefits of research are justly distributed.
- The IRB will be informed as soon as practicable but no later than 3 business days from receipt of any
complaints from participants regarding risks and benefits of the research.
- The IRB will be informed as soon as practicable but no later than 3 business days from receipt of the
complaint of any information and unexpected or adverse events that would increase the risk to the
participants and cause the level of review to change. Please use the Event Report Form to submit information about such events.

- The confidentiality and privacy of the participants and the research data will be maintained appropriately.

While the exempt status is effective for the life of the study, if it is modified, all substantive changes must be submitted to the IRB for prospective review. In some circumstances, changes to the protocol may disqualify the project from exempt status. Revisions in procedures that would change the review level from exempt to expedited or full board review include, but are not limited to, the following:

- New knowledge that increases the risk level;
- Use of methods that do not meet the exempt criteria;
- Surveying or interviewing children or participating in the activities being observed;
- Change in the way identifiers are recorded so that participants can be identified;
- Addition of an instrument, survey questions, or other change in instrumentation that could pose more than minimal risk;
- Addition of prisoners as research participants;
- Addition of other vulnerable populations;
- Under certain circumstances, addition of a funding source

Additionally, if the faculty advisor for this project will change, you will need to submit an amendment to update any applicable documents listing faculty advisor. You will also need to submit a completed Amendment Request and the CITI training for your new advisor. This amendment will need to be submitted in IRBNet via a new package, reviewed, and approved before the new advisor takes over for this project. Investigators who plan to make any of the above changes should contact the IRB staff so that the review level can be changed as necessary. If investigators are unsure of whether an amendment needs to be submitted, they should contact the IRB staff for clarification.

**Please note**, Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) requires you to obtain approval from the Accountability and Assessment department before you can utilize staff, faculty, facilities, students or data associated with DCPS. However, please note that this exemption does not allow any interaction with minors or minor documents for research. Please include a copy of this memo when you apply for DCPS approval. Because your project was declared exempt from further UNF IRB review, you will not be required to submit your DCPS approval to the UNF IRB. However, you will need to present a copy of the DCPS approval along with this Declaration of Exempt Status Memo to school principals, teachers, staff and others when you approach them about this research.

**Your study was declared exempt effective 12/16/2014.** Please submit an Exempt Status Report by 12/16/2017 if this project is still active at the end of three years. However, if the project is complete and you would like to close the project, please submit a Closing Report Form. This will remove the project from the group of projects subject to an audit. An investigator must close a project when the research no longer meets the definition of human subject research (e.g., the data are de-identified and the researcher does not have the ability to match data to participants) or data collection and analysis are complete. If the IRB has not received correspondence at the three-year anniversary, you will be reminded to submit an Exempt Status Report. If no Exempt Status Report is received from the Principal Investigator within 90 days of the status report due date listed above, then the IRB will close the research file. The closing report or exempt status report will need to be submitted as a new package in IRBNet.

All principal investigators, co-investigators, those who obtain informed consent, collect data, or have access to identifiable data must be CITI certified in the protection of human subjects. As you may know, CITI Course
Completion Reports are valid for 3 years. Your completion report is valid through 10/21/2017 and Dr. Chant’s completion report is valid through 9/05/2015. The CITI training for renewal will become available 90 days before your CITI training expires. Please renew your CITI training within that time period by following this link: http://www.citiprogram.org. Should you have questions regarding your project or any other IRB issues, please contact the research integrity unit of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs by emailing IRB@unf.edu or calling (904) 620-2455.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within UNF’s records. All records shall be accessible for inspection and copying by authorized representatives of the department or agency at reasonable times and in a reasonable manner. A copy of this memo may also be sent to the dean and/or chair of your department.
APPENDIX C: PPT WORKBOOK

EDF 7545
Teacher/Leader Decision-Making and Reflective Practice

PPT DELIBERATION DATA SHEETS

NAME:

DATE:

What are my PPTs and how do I define them?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
### Five things I Feel Especially Good About In My Career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Thoughts (Deliberations)</th>
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### My Week’s Decisions Log

Sheet One

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### Five things I did this week

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### Personal theory influences

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### Formal theory influences

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### Planning Phase
CSS, Self-Contained
Extracurricular Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Plan</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive Phase</td>
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<td>CSS, Self-Contained</td>
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<table>
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<th>Implementation</th>
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<table>
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<th>Reflective Phase</th>
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<td>Extracurricular Activities</td>
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<th>Post Implementation</th>
<th>My Deliberations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Implications for MY Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“What are your “non-negotiables” when it comes to teaching children with disabilities?”

“What are some of the challenges you face working with children with disabilities?”

“How do you perceive your role in working with families?”

“Does reflective practice impact your decision making?”

The workbook (Appendix C) served as the main guide for interview questions. These guiding questions supported the workbook.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time / Activity</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Student Focused Paraprofessional</th>
<th>Comments/Contingency Plans SLP/OT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:00-8:30 Morning Duty</strong></td>
<td>Teacher Planning, Meetings, Parent Conferences, etc.</td>
<td>Morning duty in classroom. Monitor all students upon arrival. Assist students in unpacking their backpacks.</td>
<td>Morning duty in classroom. Monitor all students upon arrival. Keeping in close proximity to GP. Assist students in unpacking their backpacks.</td>
<td>SLP@8 (Tue) – AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:30-8:40 Breakfast/Restroom</strong></td>
<td>Make sure all students have unpacked their backpacks and if not prompt to do so. Ring timer for students to go check schedule for breakfast. Assist students in checking their schedules and getting seated at the breakfast table. Monitor student movement to restroom. *Stay in close proximity to BS, AW and AJ to make sure they are seated at the breakfast table and eating. Record daily attendance.</td>
<td>Assist students in checking their schedules and getting seated at the breakfast table. Assist students in communicating breakfast choices. *Stay in close proximity to NM, TC and AG to make sure they are seated at the breakfast table and eating.</td>
<td>Assist students in checking their schedule and getting seated at the breakfast table. Assist students in communicating breakfast choices. *Stay in close proximity to GP to make sure he is seated at the breakfast table and eating. *Assist GP with bathroom routine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:40-9:00</strong></td>
<td>Ring timer to go check schedules for morning</td>
<td>Provide assistance to AG, TC and AW in</td>
<td>Provide full assistance to GP in checking his</td>
<td>Classroom Para will lead in case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Group</td>
<td>Checking their schedules and getting to their desks. Stay in close proximity of NM, BS and TC. Conduct morning group. Provide verbal, visual and/or gestural prompting when needed.</td>
<td>Checking their schedules and getting to their desks. Stay in close proximity of AW, AJ and AG. Assist students with their communication binders. Monitor all students and provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed.</td>
<td>Schedule and getting seated at his desk. Stay in close proximity of GP and AG. Assist GP with communication binders. Provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed.</td>
<td>of a sub.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 10:20 Morning Learning Centers</td>
<td>Ring timer to go check schedules for morning learning centers. Provide assistance to NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules and getting to their correct locations. Conduct Direct Instruction/ PCI * Ring timer every 20 minutes for students to check schedule and rotate centers.</td>
<td>Provide assistance to AG, TC and AW in checking their schedules and getting to their correct locations. Conduct center activity. Monitor students who are not at direct instruction with Teacher. <strong>Break 9:15 – 9:25 AM</strong></td>
<td>Provide full assistance to GP in checking his schedule and getting to his correct location. Stay in close proximity of GP and assist at each center. Monitor students who are not at direct instruction with Teacher <strong>Break 9:35 – 9:45 AM</strong></td>
<td>Para will become teacher in case of a sub. <strong>SLP@9:30 (Tue/Thu) – AG/GP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 – 10:30 Snack / Restroom</td>
<td>Ring timer to have students checks their schedule for snack. Assist students in checking their schedules and getting seated at the snack table. Monitor student movement to restroom. *Stay in close proximity to BS, AJ and AW to make sure they are seated at the snack table and eating.</td>
<td>Assist students in checking their schedules and getting seated at the breakfast table. Assist students in communicating snack choices. *Stay in close proximity to NM, TC and AG to make sure they are seated at the snack table and eating.</td>
<td>Assist students in checking their schedules and getting seated at the snack table. Assist students in communicating snack choices. *Stay in close proximity to GP to make sure he is seated at the snack table and eating. *Assist GP with bathroom routine.</td>
<td><strong>OT@10:45 (Wed) - AJ</strong>  <strong>OT@10:15 (Fri) – AG &amp; NM</strong>  <strong>OT@10:45 (Fri) – GP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Schedule for playground. Provide visual, verbal and/or gestural prompts for them to line up. Stay in close proximity of BS during transition to ensure his safety. Monitor ALL students at ALL times to ensure safety. Assist them in communicating and playing with others. Stay in close proximity to BS, AW, NM, TC, AJ and AG to ensure they are making safe choices. Signal for students to line up. Stay in close proximity of BS during transition to ensure his safety. Monitor ALL students to ensure their safety during transition back to the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>for NM, TC and AW to line up. Stay in close proximity of AG during transition to ensure his safety. Monitor ALL students at ALL times to ensure safety. Assist them in communicating and playing with others. Stay in close proximity to BS, AW, NM, TC, AJ and AG to ensure they are making safe choices. Stay in close proximity of AG during transition to ensure his safety. Monitor ALL students to ensure their safety during transition back to the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>verbal and/or gestural prompts for him to line up. Stay in close proximity of GP during transition to ensure his safety. Monitor ALL students at ALL times to ensure safety. Stay in close proximity of GP to ensure he is making safe choices. Stay in close proximity of GP. Provide verbal, visual and/or gestural prompts for him to line up. Stay in close proximity of GP during transition to ensure his safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Signal to have students check their schedule for quiet time. Provide assistance to AG, TC, AW, NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules. Complete home notes, daily folders and monitor students to make sure they are sitting and working on something quietly. (Students may be working on a</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Lunch Break 11:00 – 11:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Assist GP with bathroom routine. Provide verbal, visual and or gestural prompts for GP to check schedule. Provide assistance to other students in checking their schedules. Stay in close proximity of GP. Assist in monitoring ALL students to make sure they are sitting and working on something quietly. (Students may be working on a computer, drawing on a dry erase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30–12:00 Social Skills</td>
<td>Ring the timer to have students check their schedule for Social Skills. Provide assistance to NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules and getting seated at their desks. Conduct social skills lesson. Engage students by asking questions and encouraging hands on participation. Provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed. Stay in close proximity of NM, BS and TC.</td>
<td>Provide full assistance to AG, AW and TC in checking their schedules and getting seated at their desks. Stay in close proximity of AW, AJ and AG and assist with communication binders. Monitor all students and provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting as needed.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00–12:30 Prepare for Lunch/Lunch</td>
<td>Ring timer for students to check schedules. Stay in close proximity of BS, AJ and NM. Provide verbal, visual and/or gestural prompts for them to check schedule, get lunch tag/lunchbox and wait in line. Monitor movement to restroom. Transition students to lunch and provide constant supervision to Provide verbal, visual and or</td>
<td>Stay in close proximity of AG, TC and AW. Provide verbal, visual and/or gestural prompts for to check schedule, get lunch tag/lunchbox and wait in line. Stay in close proximity of AG and monitor TC and AW during transition to ensure their safety. Assist students with making lunch selections. Remain with class, monitor and assist students in the cafeteria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00–12:30 Assist GP with bathroom routine. Stay in close proximity of GP during transition to ensure his safety. Assist students in making lunch selections. Remain with class, monitor and assist students in the cafeteria.</td>
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**WATCH ALL STUDENTS**

Provide full assistance to GP in checking his schedule and getting seated at his desk. Stay in close proximity of GP and AG. Assist GP with communication binder. Provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00 –</td>
<td>gestural prompts for him to check schedule, get lunch tag / lunchbox and</td>
<td>Stay in close proximity of BS and monitor AJ and NM during transition to ensure their safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>wait in line. Stay in close proximity of BS and monitor AJ and NM during transition to ensure their safety.</td>
<td><strong>Lunch Break 12:00 – 12:30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>cafeteria. Stay in close proximity of AG during lunch to ensure his safety.</td>
<td>Stay in close proximity of AG during lunch to ensure his safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>from lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay in close proximity of GP during transition to ensure his safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to classroom</td>
<td>Pick up students in lunch room at 12:30. Transition students back to classroom and provide constant supervision for NM and AJ and remain in close proximity of BS to ensure their safety.</td>
<td>Stay in close proximity of AG and provide constant supervision for TC and AW. Provide verbal, visual and/or gestural prompts for them to line up. Stay in close proximity of them during transition to ensure their safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 –</td>
<td>Ring the timer to have students check their schedule for Group Time. Provide assistance to NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules and getting seated at their desks. Conduct a health, science or social studies lesson. Engage students by asking questions and encouraging hands on participation. Assist GP with communication binder. Provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed. Stay in close proximity of GP,</td>
<td><strong>Lunch Break 12:35 – 1:05</strong> Para will lead in case of a sub.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 Group</td>
<td>Provide assistance to AG, TC and AW in checking their schedules and getting to their desks. Stay in close proximity of TC, AW, AJ and AG. Assist students with communication binders. Monitor all students and provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting as needed.</td>
<td>Provide full assistance to GP in checking his schedule and getting seated at his desk.</td>
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<td>Time/Move</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>NM and BS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00–2:00</td>
<td>Ring timer to go check schedules for afternoon learning centers. Provide assistance to NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules and getting to their correct locations. Conduct DI math lesson. *Ring timer every 20 minutes for students to check schedule and rotate centers.</td>
<td>Provide assistance to AG, TC and AW in checking their schedules and getting to their correct locations. Conduct center activity. Monitor students who are not in direct instruction with Teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00–2:20</td>
<td>Ring the timer to have students check their schedule for story time. Provide assistance to NM, AJ and BS in checking their schedules and getting seated at their desks. Stay in close proximity of NM, BS and TC. Read story and ask students questions about the story. Provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting when needed. Assist students in completing a reader’s response.</td>
<td>Provide assistance to AG, TC and AW in checking their schedules and getting to their desks. Stay in close proximity of AW, AJ and AG. Assist students with their communication binders. Monitor all students and provide verbal, visual, and/or gestural prompting as needed. Assist students in completing a reader’s response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:20–2:30</td>
<td>Assist all students in packing up belongings.</td>
<td>Assist all students in packing up belongings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 Dismissal</td>
<td>Walk out car riders (GP and NM)</td>
<td>Walk out extended day(AW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>Monitor all students in Car rider duty</td>
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### APPENDIX F: 2014-2015 ZONING PLAN, KIMBERLY

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<tr>
<th>Time/Activity</th>
<th>(Teacher)</th>
<th>Para</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>OT</th>
<th>Speech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:45 Arrival/Breakfast</td>
<td>Assist with unpacking/checking schedule</td>
<td>Assisting with buses/Take student to cafeteria to get breakfast and return to classroom.</td>
<td>Mondays P.E. With Specially Designed PE Coach</td>
<td>Wednesdays Sensory group 8:30-9:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:45-9:20 Rotation 1</td>
<td>Work with Group 3 on Fine Motor activities</td>
<td>Supervise Journal helping students complete their page and tell about it if they can</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:20-9:50</td>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
<td>Prompt and assist all students particularly Z and A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:50-10:10 Centers</td>
<td>IW with Lu and A while supervising leisure and computers.</td>
<td>DI with Z, first then with Lo</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:10-10:30</td>
<td>DI with A and Lu while overseeing books</td>
<td>IW with Lo and Z and supervise leisure and computers</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30-10:50 Centers</td>
<td>DI with M,D,T, A</td>
<td>Bathroom A, Lu, Lo and Z</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:50-11:05</td>
<td>Run Story time</td>
<td>Oversee M, T, D, and A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:05-11:35</td>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Oversee Playground activities</td>
<td>At lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with checking schedule for bathroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>On days we have resource the resource teacher and classroom teacher will instruct students.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35-11:50</td>
<td>Oversee snack activities</td>
<td>Assist and prompt students when needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:50-12:10</td>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>DI with M and T</td>
<td>IW with D and A, oversee leisure and computers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On Mondays T and D with Maria</td>
<td></td>
<td>12:00-12:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10-12:30</td>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>IW with M and T while supervising leisure and computers</td>
<td>DI with A and D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On Tuesday s A and Z 12:00-12:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30-12:50</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>Instruct Social Skills</td>
<td>Assist and prompt students while dismissing them one at a time for bathroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:50-1:20</td>
<td>Student Lunch time</td>
<td>Walk students to cafeteria and go to lunch</td>
<td>Supervise students in the cafeteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:20-1:40</td>
<td>PM meeting</td>
<td>Run PM meeting</td>
<td>Assist and prompt students especially Z and A</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:40-2:00</td>
<td>Supervise sensory activity for Z, A,</td>
<td>Supervise smart board</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>Activity 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00-2:15</td>
<td>Write home notes and prepare backpacks for dismissal</td>
<td>Supervise Choice time activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:15-2:30</td>
<td>Oversee computer and leisure activities</td>
<td>Take Z, Lo, Lu ad M to bus 213 when called</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lu, and Lo</td>
<td>activity for M, T, D and A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Melissa Call has been an educator in Jacksonville, Florida for over 20 years in both the private and public sector. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education in 1993 and received a Master’s degree in Educational Leadership in 2009. She has spent the past three years working as a CSS site coach for an elementary and middle school in an large school district in Florida. Melissa also works as an academic coach for a number of universities, teaching graduate courses in special education and educational leadership. In addition to working with students with disabilities in a school setting, she spends her summers working as a director of a summer camp for adults and teens with disabilities.