An Examination of the Perceptions of Elementary School Principals, General Education Teachers, and Special Education Teachers about Supportive Inclusion Practices and Processes

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ABOUT SUPPORTIVE INCLUSION PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

by

Ahmed Afia Laroussi

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership, Counseling, and Sport Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
AUGUST 2016

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DEDICATION

To my mother Rahma Elouat and my wife Hayat Amghar. Your love and sacrifice have carried me. May you too always be loved, content, and happy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a fulfilling learning journey for me from the first time I met Dr. Katherine Kasten, who gave me the opportunity to challenge myself and successfully earn this Doctorate degree in Education. Many wonderful people I met inspired and provided support and encouragement throughout this process. I am grateful to my wife Hayat and my children, Maram, Akram, and Manal for their love and patience. I am grateful to the current Chair of my committee, Dr. Anne Swanson for her dedication, kindness, and guidance. Without her support I would not have come thus far in my doctoral dissertation. I am thankful to Dr. Christopher Janson for his flexibility and his contagious energy, enthusiasm, and openness for new ideas. I am grateful to Dr. Karen Patterson for her support, her guidance, and her time. I am grateful to Dr. Gerard Hogan who graciously accepted to be part of my committee. Finally, I am eternally grateful to Dr. Kelley Ranch who, through her concise comments and sharp editing skills, prompted me to seek perfection in my work. Words cannot express my sincere gratitude to all of those whom I have mentioned. To any one whose name I have omitted who has helped me in this journey, please know you are in my thoughts and heart as well.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the perceptions of the school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers about practices and processes that support the inclusion program. High stakeholders in schools and parents of students with disabilities are advocating for the improvement of the quality of the inclusion as an academic service delivery model. This study is significant because the number of students with disabilities being placed in the general education classroom continues to increase, and the federal and the state mandates are holding school districts and schools accountable for all students’ academic performance, including students with disabilities. A collective case study approach was used in this study to explore the lived experiences of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers with the inclusion program. Through the lenses of Bolman and Deal’s Four Frame of Leadership theoretical framework, as well as the Differentiation of Instruction model, the researcher explored the practices and processes that support the inclusion program at public elementary schools. Through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, data were collected and analyzed using a constant comparative analysis approach. The first research question investigated the beliefs and attitudes school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to support the inclusion program. The second research question inquired about the relationships they perceive to support them in implementing the inclusion program. The third research question examined the structural practices they believe support the inclusion program. The fourth research question studied the leadership aspect they perceive support the inclusion program. The fifth research question looked into the inclusiveness of instructional practices. The common themes: (a) positive attitude and self-efficacy,
(b) relationships, (c) collaboration, (d) distributive leadership and resources, and (e) differentiation of instruction and accommodations emerged from data. A uniformed district policy procedure vis-a-vis the inclusion program, a positive culture about the inclusion program, a balanced leadership approach between the human needs and the schools’ goals, structures to foster collaboration, the application of the principles of the distributive leadership, and the implementation of inclusive instructional practices were evident in the schools.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Between 2004 and 2011 the number of 6-21 years old students with disabilities receiving academic services for more than 80% of the typical school-day time in the general education classroom has increased from 51% to 61%. (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Many scholars argue that from a legislative, moral, and efficacy standpoint, the general education classroom has become the placement of choice for students with disabilities (Sailor, 2002; Skrtic & Sailor, 1996). Currently, many school districts adopt the inclusion model to ensure that all students including students with disabilities are welcomed, valued, and learn together in the general education classroom (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Hutchinson, 2007; Loreman, 1999).

However, in the last two decades the center of conversation about students with disabilities has shifted from access and placement in the general education classroom to performance on the general curriculum Whereas Public Law 94-142, previously known as Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA,1975), ensured access to education for children with disabilities, the 1997 amendments to the Individual with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 focused on improving results for children with disabilities (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2005). Additionally, many scholars reported that high stake holders in schools and parents of students with disabilities are advocating for the improvement in the quality of inclusion as an academic service delivery model (Davis, 1989; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Firestone 1993; Fuchs [Douglas], Fuchs [Lynn], & Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998).
The intent in this investigation is to understand existing practices and processes that support the inclusion model. Some researchers acknowledged that the roles of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers are central to the improvement of the inclusion model (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Lupart, 2012; Orr, 2009; Rayner, 2007). Many scholars suggested that researchers must analyze the school principals’ and teachers’ perceptions about inclusion practices because they have a considerable impact on this program in their schools (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Lathan, 2000). According to Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw, and McDonald (2006), one of the first steps towards understanding practices and processes associated with the inclusion program involves identifying and understanding the perspectives and attitudes of those involved in the change process.

The moral compass underlining this study stem from a professional and personal belief that a focus on practices and processes school principals and teachers perceive as supportive to inclusion would contribute to its improvement. Drucker (2002) argued that by looking at strengths, we could make a system’s weakness irrelevant. Thus, in this study, I opted to use an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, for I will essentially focus on successful practices and processes associated with the inclusion model. Kozick, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gardel, and Black (2009) stated that Appreciative Inquiry is a method of organizational development that uses past success to create a vision of the future. Approaches to practices that build on strengths are not new in social work (Saleebey, 2006; Buttler, 2005).
Statement of the Problem

Although substantial literature indicated that progress has been made towards including most students with disabilities in the general education classroom, research showing evidence about the effectiveness of inclusion relative to the academic performance of students with disabilities has been inconclusive (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2011; MacLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Researchers on inclusion reported significant variability in both the definition and the implementation of the inclusion concept from district to district and from school to school (Burstein et al., 2004; Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006). Some scholars argued that the different ways in which schools frame their responses to federal policies and regulations prescribed in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) and in the No Child Let Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 was an indication that there is a gap in agreement among educators regarding effective strategies to targeting students with disabilities (Black, 2011; Salisbury, 2006). Orr (2009) stated that, Ardent inclusionist, myself somewhat included in this camp, would take exception to the notion that inclusion can be accomplished in a variety of ways” (p. 236).

Based on literature evidence, high stake holders in schools and parents of students with disabilities are advocating for the improvement in the quality of inclusion as an academic service delivery model (Davis, 1989; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Firestone, 1993; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998). Although many scholars acknowledged that the role of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers is central to the implementation of a successful inclusion program (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Lupart, 2012; Orr,
2009; Rayner, 2007), research revealed that some school leaders and teachers believe that they are under-prepared to deal with students who have special needs (Collins, 2003; Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

The lack of consensus on the effectiveness of inclusion pertaining to the academic performance of students with disabilities, the call from high-stake holders for the delivery of a high quality inclusion program, and the fundamental role of school principals and teachers in the implementation of inclusion, beg the question of what do we know about the perceptions of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers in relation to practices and processes that support the inclusion program. It is through the perceptions of these educators that I intend to identify, understand, and describe practices and processes that support the inclusion program. The impact of school principals, general education teacher, and special education on the implementation of educational programs has been abundantly documented by literature.

**Research question**

What practices and processes do elementary school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to be supportive to inclusion programs?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for practical, legal, educational, and methodological reasons. The number of students with disabilities placed in the general education classroom has been consistently rising and this increase continues to have a major impact on schools (McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1998)—especially in the era of accountability and school comprehensive reforms when federal mandates and school districts’ policies continue to put the pressure on
schools to improve the academic performances of students (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, for example, created provisions to ensure that no children—especially those with the greatest learning needs—are neglected in standards-driven learning environments (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002).

Given that school leaders and teachers have been inarguably identified as key to the success or failure of educational programs (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Lupart, 2012; Rayner, 2007), an increased knowledge about supportive practices associated with the inclusion program, adds credible insights to an educational area where there is a persistent need to meet the requirements of all students. Some scholars reported that examples of successful inclusion in practice are not well represented in research (McGhie-Richmond, Irvine, Loreman, Cizman, & Lupart, 2013). The need for such knowledge has been argued to be crucial as school districts move toward inclusive educational practices (DiPaola, Tschamen-Moran, & Thomas, 2004). Additionally, research evidence indicated that increased knowledge of special education programs and related issues has a direct impact on improving the abilities of administrators and teachers to develop and implement special education programs successfully (DiPaola, Tschamen-Moran, & Thomas, 2004; Praisner, 2003). One of the main barriers to inclusion that was identified by researchers was the lack of knowledge of special education issues (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000).

This investigation is critical because it builds on previous research that examined the inclusion model from an organizational and delivery perspective. A large body of research and literature regarding the efficacy of inclusion (Copeland, McCall, Williams, Guth, & Fowler, 2002; Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999), indicated that very few studies have been conducted on
inclusion from an organizational perspective (Rice & Harris, 2003). It is also an important study because the main focus is to identify supportive practices that promote the inclusion program. That is, the approach to this investigation stems from an *Appreciative Inquiry* perspective. Many scholars suggested that some educators should focus more on identifying successful practices associated with inclusion as a service-delivery model rather than on an indiscriminate implementation of a full inclusion policy (Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kavale & Forness, 2000; King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). Furthermore, this study is unique, for not many scholars have attempted to use Bolman and Deal’s four frames organization framework to investigate inclusion as an academic service delivery model.

This study is also paramount from a research method perspective, for I used a qualitative research method. Research on special education pointed out that studies that explore the beliefs and behaviors of school leaders and teachers regarding inclusion are rare (Bargerhuff, 2001; Irvine & Lupart, 2010; Sze, 2009). Key studies in the mid-1990s revealed a striking absence of participatory qualitative research on inclusive education. Only 1.2% of the research reported in 785 articles between 1976 and 1995 addressed inclusion through qualitative research (Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Nietupski et al., 1997). However, while more qualitative researches have been added to the literature since that time, many questions remain to be addressed. Hunt and Goetz (1997) asserted that the potential for participants to understand inclusive practices is significant and that participatory research methods may redefine both the research questions that are asked and the traditional role of the researcher.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify, describe, and make meaning from the perceptions of the elementary school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers regarding practices and processes that support the inclusion program.

Objectives. The specific objectives for this investigation are as follows:

1. To identify and describe supportive practices and processes relative inclusion.
2. To identify instructional strategies that benefit students with and without learning disabilities in an inclusion classroom setting.

Theoretical Framework

Rationale for the framework selection. Considering the variety of practices and processes relative to the inclusion model (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), the multitude of definitions and interpretation of inclusion (Hines, 2001; Burstein et al., 2004; Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), the federal and state mandates and laws that put emphasis on results, the debate on inclusion has shifted from how to why. In addition, due to my professional and personal interest in inclusion as an academic service-delivery model, I opted to use Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership theoretical framework (2008) to conduct this investigation. This choice was determined after I understood that in essence, the motivating factor behind this investigation is to understand and identify existing supportive organization and delivery practices associated with the inclusion model.

The premise of Bolman and Deals’ theoretical framework. Bolman and Deal (2008) argued that effective and sustainable change occurs when leaders concurrently confront their organizations on four frames:
a. Structural frame, which deals with the organization’s policies, procedures, rules, and resources.

b. Human resource frame, which addresses how the organization treats and supports its individuals’ needs.

c. Political frame, which attends to how an organization deals with power.

d. Symbolic/cultural frame, which focuses on the culture and the values of the organization.

The application of Bolman and Deal’s theoretical framework. Goldman and Smith (1991) stated that the four frames of leadership theoretical framework provide a unique window on the process of organizational change in schools. The four frames of leadership constitute a theoretical framework that is well suited for understanding schools because it stresses the human resource and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Goldman & Smith, 1991). Research evidence suggested that school culture (Hehir & Katzman, 2012; Villa & Thousand, 1996; Wesley & Buysse, 2004;) and professional development of staff (Council for Exceptional Children, 1995; Vernon-Dotson, 1998) are prerequisites for effective implementation of educational programs. Hehir and Katzman (2012) used Bolman and Deal’s *Four Frames of Leadership* framework to analyze the different pathways school leaders perform to lead their schools.

Relationship to Bolman and Deal’s theoretical framework. As a structural leader, the school principal organizes and establishes structures and processes in school administration to support the school’s goals and mission and to provide adequate supports for all teachers. Livingston, Reed, and Good (2001) stated that as the instructional leaders of their schools, principals have the responsibility in the restructuring and leading of special education initiatives.
The school principal exercises human resource leadership by supervising and monitoring teachers, developing their skills via professional development programs, and creating conditions upon which they feel motivated to improve learning and teaching. Goldman and Smith (1991) explained that as schools deal with complex student learning problems, an explicit human resource orientation toward students and staff becomes more necessary. The school principal employs political leadership through setting agendas, developing coalitions, building teams and collaboration between special and general education teachers, rewarding and sanctioning staff, and distributing resources amongst different programs and departments. With high stake tests, the issue of placing special education students in the general education classroom requires leadership commitment to the reallocation of resources (Blackman, 1993; Lawson & Sailor, 2000). Additionally, the school principal applies symbolic/cultural leadership by leading staff to implement changes, to celebrate diversity, and to establish routines and rituals that promote core values such as civil rights. Some researchers argued that schools need to reflect on and celebrate their success to reinforce their values and beliefs in order to create an inclusive culture (Hehir & Katzman, 2012; Carrington, 1999).

**Design of the study**

In this study, I intended to identify, describe, and understand existing practices and processes which school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to be supportive to the inclusion program. Through semi-structured interviews, I sought the insiders’ perspective. In order to allow important patterns and dimensions to emerge, I used a qualitative inquiry, for such method is essentially inductive. Patton (2002) suggested that an inductive inquiry allows important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns without making
prior assumptions about the nature of the relationships among narrowly defined variables. Since the focus of this study is on identifying and describing existing practices and processes that support the inclusion model-- and because the intent in this investigation is to improve future practices and processes relative to inclusion, I used the Appreciative Inquiry approach (AI). Cooperrider et al., (2000) argued that Appreciative Inquiry builds on past success to create a vision for the future. Additionally, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of different practices associated with inclusion, I employed a multiple-case study design. Some scholars suggested that such methodology helps the researcher to understand the phenomenon of interest that is shared among diverse cases (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2000, 2006; Yin, 1994, 2009).

**Practical implications of the study**

The findings in this investigation inform teachers’ and school principals’ professional development programs and school districts’ policy vis-à-vis inclusion. Hale and Moorman (2003) reported that the general consensus about the school leaders and teachers’ preparation programs is that they are too theoretical and lack adequate clinical experience. Reflection, collaborative learning, and active problem solving are essential elements of leadership preparation programs (Bridges & Hallinger, 1997; Milstein, 1993; Tucker & Grogan, 2001). Villa and Thousand (2005) asserted that schools that have successfully restructured into inclusive settings identify collaboration and team decision-making as fundamental to their success. The outcome of this study increases the school districts’ awareness about its compliance with federal and state policies relative to meeting the academic needs of students with disabilities. Literature evidence suggested that although for almost forty years, federal special education policy
mandates have required U.S. school districts to create policies and structures that increase access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities, the existing research regarding inclusion has typically ignored the policy implementation processes by the districts (DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2013; MacKenzie, Skrtić, Dickinson, & Joseph, 2011; Morse, 2010; Nilsen, 2010; Watnick & Sacks, 2006).

**Delimitations of the study**

This investigation was delimited to include three elementary public schools (k-5) which were presumed, due to their high performance, to have best practices pertaining to inclusion. Patton (2002) suggested that researcher should select sites where to find rich information relative to the research question. These schools have met the following criteria:

- Are currently serving students with disabilities in general education classroom for at least 80% of the school day time;
- Have implemented inclusion for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years;
- Have earned a school grade of “A” for at least three school years.
- The school’s 3rd-5th students with disabilities’ FCAT Reading Percentage Passing Scores (Achievement level ≥ 3) was above State (27%) and District (30%) averages of 2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years.
- Have earned the highest points on an 800 scale basis.

Among 104 inclusion elementary schools from one single large urban school district in Florida, 24 schools earned a grade “A” for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. In 2013-2014, three of these schools earned the highest points on a scale of 800 basis. These scores were 609 points, 600 points, and 570 (Florida Department of Education, 2014).
Limitations of the study

A possible limitation of this study could stem from the definition of inclusion I used. In this investigation I perceived inclusion as an academic service delivery model. Not all states and school districts define inclusion from a pragmatic and practical perspective. Another limitation may emerge from the sample I selected, which was confined to school principals and teachers from high performing elementary schools. That is, such sample might not represent the true characteristics of the population involved with the inclusion program. Many other schools reported low academic performance of students with disabilities. Additionally, potential limitations may be the semi-structured interview questions which could lead to different interpretations. Participants may give the answer that they believe the researcher want to hear rather than what they may truly believe. This limitation was addressed in Chapter Three using member-checking technique to increase the credibility of this study. There were 16 participants involved in this study. Thus, it may be difficult to reach a logical generalization. Patton (2002) argued that the researcher should seek information-rich cases rather than focusing on the size of the sample. Though there are many potential limitations in this study, there is also the possibility that this investigation would produce significant findings that can contribute to improving existing practices and processes relative to the inclusion program.

Summary and organization of the study

In Chapter 1, I described the background of the study, I stated the problem, I posited the research question, I elaborated on the significance of the study, and I followed by a statement of the purpose and objectives of this investigation. I explained why I used Bolman and Deal’s *Organizational Theoretical Framework of Leadership*, I identified the research methodology I
used, I listed the practical implications of this investigation, and I listed the delimitations and limitations of this study. The remainder of the study was organized into four additional chapters:

- A review of relevant literature (Chapter 2),
- An overview of research methodology and design (Chapter 3),
- Analysis and interpretation of data (Chapter 4),
- The implications of findings for future studies (Chapter 5).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Currently in the United States, there are two federal laws in place that address the rights of all students to an education that is appropriate, effective, and implemented in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): which are the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). These two laws have placed increased demand on educators and held them accountable for ensuring that all students meet predetermined standards of achievement on local curricular standards and state-mandated assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The intent of this investigation was to identify and describe the perceptions of the elementary school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers about practices and processes that support the inclusion program. This study is critical because the number of students with disabilities placed in a general education classroom is increasing (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), the academic performance of these pupils is required (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001), and the overarching objective of both the international and the national communities is to improve social justice and equity in the education system (The Salamanca Statement, 1994). This qualitative inquiry is also important from a research and methodology perspectives, for research evidence suggests that in regard to inclusion, there is a need for further research, especially research of a qualitative nature (Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Nietupski, Hamre-Nietpuski, Curtin, & Shrikanth, 1997).

Scope of review

A substantial body of literature reported that inclusion is a complex, multidimensional, and challenging concept to be characterized (Riehl, 2000; Salisbury, 2006; Sands, Adams,&
Stout, 1995). In this literature review, I cover research pertaining to practices and processes that support the inclusion program. McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) stated that, “All too often, service delivery for students with disabilities has been considered a peripheral issue, one that can be handled within the special education structures of the school” (p. 9). Thus, the search for and selection of literature to include in this study was guided by a pragmatic and practical definition of inclusion. Some scholars suggested that one way to frame the conversation about inclusion is to ask how services and supports available to a school can be organized and coordinated in a way that benefits students (Sailor, 1991; Sailor & Skrtic, 1996; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McLurg, 2008). The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) stated that inclusion means:

Providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society (NCERI, 1995, p. 99).

The scope of this literature review is limited to supportive inclusion practices and processes. Many scholars believe that there is plenty of evidence that education can change and change for better based on what teachers do (Hart, Dixon, Drummond, & McIntire, 2004). Additionally, literature documenting the successful trend of inclusion practices is significant and growing (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994). The materials I include in this review were selected based on relevance to the research question. In this review, I discuss Bolman and Deal’s (2008) *Four Frames of Organization* framework in relation to inclusion as an organization and service
delivery of academic services to students with disabilities placed in the general education classroom. Throughout this study, I interchangeably use the words inclusion and inclusive. Sailor (2000) pointed out that the terms inclusion and inclusive education are now becoming supplanted by signifiers associated with different rubrics and agendas.

Outline of review

Following a description of the methodology I used in my literature search, I briefly describe the historical evolution of the inclusion movement. I highlight benefits and drawbacks of the inclusion concept. I discuss central role of school principals and teachers in relation to the implementation of inclusion. I describe the role of a school district policy relative to inclusion. I discuss literature on Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Organization in relation to the inclusion model. I define the Appreciative Inquiry approach and explain its rationale in relation to this investigation. I follow with a description of substantiated inclusion practices. I cover trends of inclusion. I conclude this chapter with key terms definitions.

Methodology

An initial literature search was conducted on several databases such as ERIC, QUEST, Sage Science Direct, Abstracts, Google Scholar, and Yahoo Ask. The descriptors I used included: inclusion, inclusive education, special education, collaboration, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), disability, special education teacher, and general education teacher. These general searches were followed up with more specific citation searches. From this initial search, a wealth of literature was identified in relation to the definition, the interpretation, and practices associated with inclusion. It became then possible, based on this information, to identify the
definition of inclusion I perceived fit the purpose of this study and to build the conceptual framework I used to collect, analyze, and interpret data relative to positive practices relative to inclusion. This review incorporated findings from peer review journals and from an earlier literature review of international documents, reports, and projects compiled by the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Materials were organized according to themes as indicated by this chapter’s headings.

**Historical background of inclusion**

Prior to 1970, no major federal laws specifically protected the civil or constitutional rights of Americans with disabilities. With strong support and advocacy of family associations such as The Arc of the United States (The Arc, 1950), the federal government began, through legislation to lay the foundations for implementing effective programs, and services of early interventions and special education programs in states and school districts across the country. In 1973, a critical turning point came with the passage of the *Rehabilitation Act*—especially Section 504 of the Act, which banned recipients of federal funds from discriminating against people with disabilities. In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA), often referred to as Public Law 94-142, to support states and localities in protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and their families. This landmark law guaranteed a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to each child with disability in every school district across the nation. In 1997, Public Law 94-142 was amended and became known as the *Individual with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). The most recent amendments to IDEA were enacted by the Congress in 2004 as P.L.108-446, “Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.” IDEA required states to implement policies which assure that all children with disabilities have
the right to access a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and to be educated with their peers without disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to meet their unique needs (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2005). Turnbull, Huerta, and Stowe (2006) stated that the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) through its fourth principle, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), enacted a presumption that students who have learning disabilities will be granted access to and educated in the general education curriculum. As such, the authors argued, this presumption was in favor of inclusion. Kluth, Villa, and Thousand (2002); and Yell and Dragsow (1999) asserted that the language contained in IDEA (2004) was the impetus for the word inclusion, and it set the stage for inclusion. Busby, Ingram, Brown, Oliver, and Lyons (2012) claimed that the least restrictive environment (LRE) is simply referred to as inclusion.

Legislation was not the only component that has driven inclusive education. Landmark court decisions have also increased educational opportunities for students with disabilities. According to the Federal Budget Education Project (2012), two major U.S. District Court cases provided the foundation for a state and local obligation to educate children with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. First, in the case of Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Pennsylvania (E.D. Pa 1971), a federal district court ruled that children diagnosed with mental retardation in Pennsylvania were entitled to a free public education and that whenever possible they should be educated in the general education classroom (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth, 1971). Second, in the case of Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (DC Dist. Of Columbia 1972), the court expanded on this decision to include all disabled students in the general education setting.
In 1975, these court cases were followed by the federal legislation which enacted the Public Law 94-142, known as Education for All “Handicapped Children” Act (EHA) (Horricks, White, & Roberts, 2008). Based on EHA, students with disabilities from ages 5-21 are required to be educated with their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent possible, regardless of the nature and severity of their disabilities (Osgood, 2005). Kluth, Villa, and Thousand (2003) stated that the Public Law 94-142 (EHA) which became known after subsequent reauthorization in 1990, 1997, and 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA); Public Law 101-476; and Public Law 105-17, set the stage for inclusive schooling, ruling that every child is eligible to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and to learn in the least restrictive environment possible (LRE). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) emphasized that students with disabilities should be educated with typically developing students in the general education classes to the greatest extent possible. The text of IDEA describes LRE as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities… are educated with children who are not disabled; and special classes, separate schoolings, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEA, 2004)

In addition to legislation and court cases, parents, educators, and governmental organizations played an important role in promoting the inclusion movement. Boyd (2001) reported that in the 1980s, the leadership of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation
Services (OSERS) promoted a powerful movement known as the Regular Education Initiative (REI). This movement, Boyd explained, was originally conceived to promote the idea that students with mild learning disabilities could participate in the general education program at their neighborhood school. However, there was no consensus to implement the inclusion model (McLeskey, 2007). Some scholars argued that the merger of general and special education was, at best, naïve, and, at worst, reckless (Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Lieberman, 1985; Mesinger, 1985).

Within this heated debate context, the concept of integration, as supported by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS), was further expanded by the parents and advocates of students with mild and severe disabilities and became known as inclusive schooling (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Skrtic, 1991; W. Stainback & S. Stainback, 1984; Villa & Thousand, 1995). Today, every state is implementing inclusive schooling at some level. In the United States (U.S), inclusive education has become an integral part of education policy at state and federal levels; it is viewed as an opportunity for all students to receive a quality education (Florida State University, 2002).

In 1994, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) argued in its Salamanca Statement that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society, achieving education for all, improving efficiency, and ultimately ensuring cost effectiveness of the entire education system. Thus, educating students who have learning disabilities in an inclusion setting alongside their peers without learning disabilities has become an international, national, and each state’s legal, moral, and educational most preferable option to meeting the educational needs of
students. Sailor (2002) argued that from a legislative, moral, and efficacy standpoint, the general education classroom has become the placement of choice for students with disabilities.

**Critics of inclusion**

Review of literature revealed that both opponents and proponents of inclusion can find scattered research to support their respective views. While some studies showed increased academic performance of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000), others questioned its effectiveness (Kauffman, 2002; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Sailor & Rodger, 2005). Additionally, some scholars argued that the lack of a general consensus among educators on a universally accepted definition of inclusion often leads to different interpretations and practices of inclusion (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Hewitt, 1999; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Will, 1986).

**Competing definitions of inclusion.** Some researchers reported that federal statutes, regulations, and case law have resulted in some tension and confusion relative to the implementation of inclusion (Crockell & Kauffman, 1999; Huefner, 1994). Both federal laws governing education of children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004 and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*) have required that a significant effort be made to place students with disabilities in a general education classroom setting, but neither have mentioned the word *inclusion* (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2013; Stout, 2001; Yell & Drasgow, 1999). Additionally, many scholars have used the words *inclusion or inclusive education* intermittently to reflect different perspectives. Ainscow (2007) explained that the concept of inclusive education has come to mean many things from the very specific—for example, the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools—to a very broad notion of social inclusion as used by
governments and the international community as a way of responding to diversity among learners.

**The social justice and equity perspective.** Many educators and scholars argued that inclusive schooling has generated critics of contemporary school cultures and called for support to human rights, respect for differences, equity in treatment and educational opportunities, and value of diversity and social justice (Udavi-Solvner & Kluth, 1997). Ballard (2003a) stated that inclusive education is concerned with issues of social justice and asks for teachers to be aware of how to create classrooms and ensure fairness and equity for all students. For example, teachers could use accommodations, adaptation of the curriculum, and differentiation of instruction, to facilitate access to learning opportunities to all students regardless of their disabilities/abilities.

**The politics of exclusion perspective.** Some scholars perceived inclusive education from the politics of exclusion stand and argued that inclusion is a fundamental rejection of special education and regular education’s claims to be inclusive and as such inclusion demands that we address the politics of exclusion and representation (Slee, 2007). One of the leading authorities in this camp is Skrtic (1991) who rejects the presence of a dual educational system-special education and general education classes and programs in same schools. Skrtic asserted that the very existence of special education is an indication of the failure of the education system to meet the needs of students with disabilities. That is, the author contends that this bureaucratic approach was inadequate to promote equity for students with disabilities.

**The pragmatic perspective.** Some researchers recognized the actual context of public schools and approached the inclusion as embedded in the special education services and supports (Lawson & Sailor, 2000; Levin & Chasin, 1995; Pugach & Johnson, 2001; Wasik, Ross, Smith,
& Dianda, 1996). Other researchers argued that the idea of inclusion should be rethought as an academic service delivery approach (Lewis & Doorlag, 1995; Mittler, 2000; Slavin, Madde, Dolan, 2001; Warnock, 2005). The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) stated that inclusion means:

Providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society. (NCERI, 1995, p.99)

**Drawbacks of inclusion.** Literature had extensively reported on barriers that hinder the implementation of an effective inclusion program (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Salend, 2000). The support of school districts to school leaders and teachers has been identified by many researchers as key to ensuring successful and effective educational programs and reforms (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Research based evidence revealed that some school leaders and teachers believe that they are under-prepared to deal with students who have special needs (Collins, 2003; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). A number of studies reported major concerns related to having sufficient resources in the classroom to make inclusion successful (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Waldron, 2007). The culture of staff was also found to significantly impact every aspect of the school’s stability, cohesion, and ability for adjustments (Cheng, 1993; Edmonds, 1979; Fyans & Maehr; 1990). Literature has acknowledged that many teachers and school principals continue to voice dissatisfaction with the entire inclusion process (Burdette, 2010; Clampit, Hollfield, & Nichols, 2004). However, the study of obstacles that
hinder the implementation of an effective inclusion program is beyond the scope of this study. The focus of this study was on identifying positive inclusion practices. According to some researchers, examples of successful inclusion in practice have not been well represented in the literature (McGhie-Richmond, Irvine, Loreman, Cizman, & Lupart, 2013).

Benefits of inclusion. Literature presented reports indicating that overall, teachers and many parents expressed positive attitudes toward inclusion (Myles & Simpson, 1990; Scruggs Mastropieri, 1996). Many scholars recognize that an inclusion setting provides students with opportunities to grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Hunt, Farron-Davis, & Goetz, 1996; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1994) found in their review of a three meta-analyses that studied the most effective educational setting for students with disabilities a small to moderate positive effect for inclusive placement was found in all their meta-analyses.

Social, emotional, and ethical benefits. Stahmer, Carter, Baker and Miwa (2003) pointed out that typically developing children exhibit advanced social skills, fewer disruptive behaviors, less prejudices, and an increased awareness of the needs of others in an inclusive setting. Fisher and Meyer (2002) concluded from a two –year longitudinal study on social competence of 40 students in inclusive and self-contained settings that students in the inclusive classrooms had significantly higher mean scores on the Assessment of Social Competence (ASC). Support of parents and teachers for inclusive classroom placement stems from reported increases in self-esteem, opportunities for socialization, increases in student enjoyment and participation (Gibb, Young, Allred, Dyches, Egan, & Ingram, 1997), and positive social and emotional outcomes (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Grenot-Scheyer, Jubala, Bishop, and Coots (1996) reported increased
skills acquisition, improved self-esteem, positive attitudes toward individual with disabilities, and strengthened commitments to moral and ethical principles. Many scholars argue that an inclusive setting profoundly affects one’s ability to communicate with others in a variety of ways, leading to greater empathy of individual needs (Kochhar, West, & Taymans; 2000; Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2009). In this investigation I sought to identify—via classroom observation—supportive inclusive practices that promote social and emotional development of students with disabilities. Literature reports indicated that the majority of students with disabilities manifest social skills deficit (Kavale & Forness, 1996).

**Academic benefits.** Stainback and Stainback (1990) concluded that inclusion is an appropriate instructional model because students with disabilities are accepted and supported by their peers and other members of the school community while having their educational needs met. Some studies show increased academic performance of students with disabilities in inclusive setting (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Ushomirsky & Hall, 2010). In a study conducted by Blackorby, Wagner, Cameto, Davis, Levine, and Newman (2005), students with disabilities who spend more time in regular classrooms were found to have higher scores on achievement tests and to perform closer to grade level than their peers who were withdrawn for instruction. Research evidences indicate that nation-wide the academic performance of school students with and without disabilities receiving services in inclusion settings has improved in reading and math (Brucker, 1994; Freagon, 1993; Giangreco, 1997; Moore, 2010; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994, Teigland, 2009; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). According to the Florida Department of Education (2014), in 2014, 27% of students with disabilities in grades 3-10 were performing at or above achievement Level 3 (Passing) on FCAT
2.0 Reading, as compared to 26% in 2013, 2012, and 2011. In 2014, 11% of students with disabilities in grades 3-10 were performing at or above achievement Level 4 on FCAT 2.0 Reading, as opposed to 10% in 2013, 2012, and 2011. In 2014, 29% of the students with disabilities in grades 3-8 were performing at or above achievement Level 3 (Passing) on FCAT 2.0 Mathematics. This is equal to 29% in 2013 and an increase from 28% in 2012 and 2011. In 2014, 11% of students with disabilities in grades 3-8 were performing at or above achievement level 4 on FCAT 2.0 Mathematics. This is consistent with 11% in 2013 and an increase from 10% in 2012 and 2011. In this investigation, I described instructional interventions teacher use with students with disabilities to promote access and success in the general education curriculum. Extensive research evidence suggests that students with disabilities fare best when placed in an inclusion setting. For example, Waldron, Cole, and Majd (2001) concluded in a two-year study on the effects of inclusive programs on students with high incidence disabilities and their typical peers that 41.7% of students with disabilities made progress in general education classroom, compared to 34% in self-contained settings. Gains in reading were comparable in both settings.

**The Centrality of school principals and teachers**

Since the intent in this investigation was to identify and describe practices and process teachers and principals perceive supportive to the implementation of educational programs, it is important to understand their relative roles vis-à-vis the implementation of the inclusion program. The centrality of school principals and teachers in the implementation of educational programs has been extensively documented in literature. Research suggests that the perception and attitude of school leaders and teachers have been determined as paramount to the success of
special education programs (Goor & Schwenne, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2003, 2004; Forlin & Loreman, 2009).

**The centrality of school principals.** There is a general consensus among researchers that school leadership is arguably recognized as one of the most pivotal factors that determines the success or the failure of special education programs (Bennett-Walker, 1996; Dyal & Flynt, 1996; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Orr, 2009; Rayner, 2007). As noted in implementing IDEA: A guide for principals (CEC & ILIAD, 2001), the principal’s values, beliefs, and personal characteristics inspire people to accomplish the school’s mission (p.19). Principals’ attitudes toward inclusion were found to be a strong predictor of effective teaching (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Negative attitudes, for example, have been shown to lead to less frequent use of effective instructional strategies (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Campbell & Gilmore, 2003). Literature recognizes that principals provide many types of support as inclusive programs are developed and sustained (Furney, Aiken, Hasazi, & Clark/Keefe, 2005; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). For example, they create and support relational networks that facilitate dialogue, build trust, and improve communication about effective ways to serve students (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). This investigation expands on existing research on the fundamental role of school principals in implementing educational programs and uncover school principals’ perception relative to supportive inclusive practices. Research evidence showed that leadership and a high level of buy-in from stakeholders is needed to support of inclusionary practices that are fair and equitable—in order to improve schools and the academic achievement of students (Richards, Aguilera, Murakami, & Weiland, 2014). An important consideration for further research on the
role of school principals is to explore the communication channels school leaders have to express their views on a school program they are responsible and accountable for its implementation.

**The centrality of teachers.** Literature acknowledges the teachers’ dominant influence on the implementation of educational programs (Burnett & Peters-Johnson, 2004; Friend & Cook, 2007; Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Lupart, 2012; Kemp & Carter, 2006; Villa & Thousand, 2007). Literature also recognizes that teachers are key to implementing inclusion and sustaining high levels of student achievement (Florian & Rouse, 2000). Some researchers argued that inclusionary practices can be identified based on teachers’ perceptions relative to supporting students with disabilities (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). One of the aims of this study was to consider teachers’ knowledge about supportive inclusion practices. A great deal of research was conducted about teachers’ attitude in regard to inclusion and students with disabilities. Florian (2008) stated that, “It is what teachers do, rather than what they are called that gives meaning to the concept of inclusive education” (p. 3). It is paramount that further research on how to deliver inclusive services focuses on understanding the interplay of socio-cultural factors that generate individual differences in the classroom rather than concentrating on one single cause.

**Policy context**

Like all public schools and universities, a school district functions within the parameters of a policy context. The intent in this investigation was to understand, via interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis the policy milieu in which school principals and teachers perform their role in relation to servicing students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Although research evidences underlined the importance of the role of the school
leadership as an essential component for enabling an inclusive whole school approach to be adopted (Boscardin, 2005; Riehl, 2000), very little research has been conducted on how school leaders put their own specific visions into daily use for the interpretation, integration, and solution of the problems (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Bridges, 1982; Hart, 1993; Murphy, 1988).

In relation to inclusion, literature recognizes that in the era of comprehensive school reforms, accountability, and federal mandates that require schools to be equitable and excellent to meeting the needs of all students, the implementation of inclusion remains problematic because the term inclusion has many definitions and interpretations (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kauffman, & Hallahan, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Some scholars argue that because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) does not specifically require students to learn general curriculum content in general education contexts; wide and disparate interpretations of what constitutes general curriculum content and contexts for instruction are found across states, schools, districts, and teacher preparation programs (Ryndak et al., 2014). Many other researchers asserted that the different ways in which schools frame their responses to federal policies and regulations prescribed in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (1997) and in the No Child Let Behind Act (2001) is an indication that there is a gap in agreement among educators regarding effective strategies to targeting students with disabilities (Black, 2011; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006). The attempt in this investigation was to increase awareness of school districts’ leaders about positive inclusion practices that could improve the schools’ and the districts’ compliance with federal and state mandates relative to servicing students with disabilities in inclusion
settings. Many scholars and educators suggest that it is paramount to espouse policies that address equitable access to both general curriculum content and contexts (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Ryndak et al., 2014), and it is crucial to strengthen district policies in order to change school practices (Turner, Chriqui, & Chaloupka, 2013). Thus, strengthening the school districts’ policies in relation to the inclusion program is essential considering that a fundamental starting point for the discussion of curriculum barriers in special education often emanates from the interpretation of the definition of inclusion rather than from the definition of inclusion (Jackson, Harper, & Jackson, 2002).

The policy role of school districts. School districts could play a crucial role in turning a school reform into action (Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). The formulation of common language across state, school districts, and schools continues to be a useful endeavor to providing clarity on instructional strategies and professional development initiatives (Berhanu, 2010). That is, local school districts have the responsibility to interpret policy mandates from their state departments of education and from the U.S. Department of Education and communicate expectations to their school leaders.

In relation to students with disabilities a school district policy may include plans for special programs and procedures relative to exceptional students such as pre-referral activities, referral procedures, eligibility criteria, program placement and dismissal, and description of program organization and operations. The plans regarding the education of students with disabilities are subject to the approval of the State Commissioner of Education and are thereby integrated in the school district’s policy. Accordingly, the Superintendent is responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy and is required to submit to the Board no later than a
predetermined date all reports prepared by the District or the by the Department of Education in relation to the referral, identification, assessment, placement, and re-evaluation processes and procedures. However, some researchers argued that policy makers and administrators from both general and special education have not sufficiently developed the policies and procedures to enact practices that ensure equitable access and progress to students with disabilities in classrooms across the country (M. Sommerstein, L. Sommerstein, R. Sommerstein, & Ryndak, 2014). Ryndak, Jackson, and White (2013) argued that educational systems inherently resist systemic changes in services, leading to substantial lags between what we know about educating students with disabilities in general education contexts and what occurs in practice.

Additionally, literature evidence regarding school districts role in implementing policies showed mixed results in relation to a school district’s effectiveness in implementing inclusion (Walker, 2002; Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003). According to Southern Regional Education Board (2010) some districts attempt to exert complete control over every phase of instruction and school operations while other districts turn all the problems over to the principal, offering little or no sense of direction or support. Some researchers reported that in the era of high accountability and standards-based performance, school districts may react in threat-rigid manner constricting information flow, increasing centralized control, and retreating to well-established processes (Daly, 2009; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Although the study of the school districts’ policy effectiveness in supporting educational programs is beyond the scope of this investigation, it is pivotal to consider further research on how states and local school districts implement federal education programs. Simon and Black (2011) reported that there is a variety of ways schools frame their response to federal policies and regulations in IDEA and NCLB in relation to
students with disabilities. The authors investigated 35 School Improvement Plans (SIP) from seven largest districts across Florida to find out how schools meet the needs of students with disabilities. They examined in the texts of SIP the supporting strategies for students with disabilities such as the language schools use that target students with disabilities, differentiated instruction, various levels of support across the school, and the nature of accommodations students with disabilities receive in the general education classroom setting. Thus, in this investigation, I rely on the text of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) to understand how schools implement inclusion.

The four frames of leadership framework

A strategic choice. Some scholars reported that the definitions, interpretations, and implementations of inclusion vary from district to district and from school to school within and across school districts (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Hewitt, 1999; Kauffman, & Hallahan, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Will, 1986). Most interview questions I employed in this study to address the research question were grounded in Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames Theoretical Framework (2008). Additionally, the current debate on inclusion is focused on the programming, organization, and delivery of services to students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. This framework was used to analyze differences and similarities of practices across and within schools which implement inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2006).

Replication. Bolman and Deal’s four frames of leadership framework was simulated using different populations by Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989), Borden, (2000), Heimovics, Herman, and Coughlin (1993,) and Hehir and Katzman (2012). In a qualitative study conducted by Bolman and Deal (1992) on school principals from Broward County, Florida and
principals from the Republic of Singapore, the authors found that preparation programs for school administrators were inadequate and that little attention was given to the political and symbolic dimensions that are critical to the success of any educational program. Hehir and Katzman (2012) employed Bolman and Deal’s four frames of leadership framework in their book *Effective Inclusive Schools: Designing Successful School Wide Programs*. Consistently, the findings from such approach have been helpful in promoting inclusive practices (Fisher, Sax, & Grove, 2000; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

**Relevance.** According to Bolman and Deal (2008), effective and sustainable change occurs only when leaders address several fronts concurrently: The human resource frame, the political frame, the structural frame, and the symbolic/cultural frame. The human resource frame views the organization from the lenses of its people and their relationship with and within the organization. Its premise is based on the assumption that organizational performance is improved via professional development of its staff. Findings from many researchers suggest that school principals, teachers, and staff need training to acquire new knowledge and skills to rise to the challenge of facilitating a successful inclusion of students with disabilities in standard-based classrooms (Defur, 2002; Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schrool, & Willigs, 2002; Florian, 2008; Florian & Rouse 2001; Goldstein, 2004; Wigle & Wilcox, 2002). The political frame views building networks and alliances in order to control scarce resources. In an inclusive school, the principal is responsible for the needs of all students as opposed to deferring matters involving students with disabilities to special education administrators (Sage & Burrello, 1994; Katsiyannis, 1994). Often, resources are prioritized and used to support programs that will improve test scores and school grades (Sindelar, Shearer, & Yendel-Hoppey, 2006). The
structural frame addresses goals, roles, and formal relationships to divide tasks among workers and to use policies and hierarchies to unify the work in order to support the mission of the organization. Skrtic (1991) argued that authority based on functionalism and bureaucratic professionalism is inconsistent with the concept of inclusion. Some scholars recommend a strengthening of the district policies in order to change school practices (Turner, Chriqui, & Chaloupka, 2013). Thousand and Villa (1992) reported that schools that have successfully restructured into inclusive environments identified collaborative teams and the group decision-making process as fundamental to their success. If schools are to become both inclusive and effective for all students, significant changes in school structure and practice must occur (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Wladron & McLeskey, 2010). Supportive inclusive service delivery requires school leaders to create scheduling of students and staff in manners that promote flexible grouping of students and foster collaborative relationships among faculty (Frattura & Coper, 2007a; Idol, Nevin, & Paolucc-Whitcomb, 1995). The symbolic/cultural frame emphasizes the culture of the organization and assigns meanings to the event that is happening in the organization. To lead an inclusive school, teachers, principals, and staff must believe that all children can learn and commit to providing all children equal access to a rich core curriculum and quality instruction (Servatius, Fellows, & Kelley, 1992). Evidence from literature about supportive inclusion practices includes suggestions to address the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and school administrators (Weiner, 2003; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998) and to conduct culture observation checklists or culture audit to measure and monitor the cultural values that promote and sustain inclusion (Bustamante, 2009; Wagner, 2006).
Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) focuses on exploring ideas people have about what is valuable in what they do and then tries to find ways on which to build. That is, the emphasis is on what has worked and not on the problems (Reed, 2002; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). According to Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003), AI has been extensively used in corporate and non-profit organizations and was also used as a method of action research. The authors asserted that this process was successful in increasing productivity. Many scholars recognize that although school-wide successful practices relative to the inclusion program exist, school leadership, vision, strong professional developments programs, and reshaping teachers attitudes vis a` vis inclusion remain powerful considerations (Cole & MacLesky, 1997; Hunt, Stub, & Alwell, 1994; Luster, & Durrrett, 2003). Thus, the intent in this investigation was to use an Appreciative Inquiry approach to discern successful practices and processes associated with the inclusion program so as to improve its future.

Supportive inclusion practices

Researchers reported evidence indicating that some schools have achieved excellent outcomes for most students, including students with disabilities (Farrel, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Ushomirsky & Hall, 2010). In a case study, which is relevant to this investigation about highly effective inclusive elementary schools conducted by McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2012), two major themes emerged as critical to the implementation of a successful inclusion program: (a) the quality of instruction, and (b) the administrative and organizational features of the delivery of academic services. One of the particulars of this investigation stems from foreseeing the potential of a multi-frame thinking
approach relative to the implementation of inclusion. Literature provides extensive evidence about striking similarities between effective practices relative to the implementation of an effective inclusion program and Bolman and Deal’s assertion that effective and sustainable change occurs only when leaders address concurrently the symbolic frame, structural frame, political, frame, and human resource frame.

**Quality of instruction.** From an instructional perspective, there has been a strong movement towards supporting students’ learning through the provision of a continuum of services (McLeskey, et al., 2012). Many school districts in U.S are currently implementing a continuum—based process of teaching and learning such as Response to Intervention (RTI) model to provide students high quality and evidence-based instruction (McIntosh, et al., 2011). For an inclusive education system, RTI emphasizes the necessity to for collective responsibility for the learning of all students (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012). In addition, there has been an increasing interest in adopting the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Ralabate et al., 2012). With an emphasis on individualization and differentiation and the design of a responsive learning environment, RTI fits rather well with UDL (Strangman & Dalton, 2006). McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2012) found that teachers were able to communicate high expectations to all students. This support might include providing explicit instruction to a small, homogeneous group of students (Gersten, et al., 2009), supporting students working in collaborative groups as part of station teaching (Friend & Cook, 2010), or teaching a large group while the classroom teacher provided this small-group support. Support was used to differentiate instruction using approaches such as centers, which were made more manageable by the fact that three adults were in the class. Hall (2002) described differentiated instruction as a process to
approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize each student’s growth and individual success. However, some scholars argue that a well-rounded appreciation of how to deliver inclusion practices requires more than a differentiation of instruction and involves an understanding of the interactive socio-cultural factors that create individual differences (Florian, 2008; Bui, 2006). In a comparative study on inclusive schools in the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Portugal, Kugelmass (2006), argued that a culture of inclusion was something deliberatively sought and worked on to create structures within the school to provide favorable environment to inclusive practices.

**Organizational features.** Research evidence suggests that supportive practices relative to inclusion as a service delivery model rely on schools working closely with parents and community (Bui, 2006), providing adequate training to teachers and administrators and support to organizational structures that fosters teamwork (Vernon-Dotson, 2008), and promoting school cultural shifts from independent to interdependent working relationships (Villa & Thousand, 1996; Wesley & Buysse, 2004). Bolman and Deal’s *Four Frames of Leadership* framework is consistent with these suggestions. That is, the inclusion program as a service delivery within the school involves a cultural frame, human resource frame, structural frame, and political frame.

**Symbolic/cultural frame.** Zoller, Ramanathan, and Yu (1999) reported that there is a link between the implementation of a successful inclusive educational setting and school culture. Various theories have recognized that the organizational culture has a significant impact on student learning and development (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Moos, 1979). Corbett (1999) drew a correlation between the cultural values of inclusion in a school’s culture and the extent to which a program of inclusion can be successful. She stated that it is about creating an institutional
culture which welcomes, supports, and nurtures diverse needs (p. 58). Carrington (1999) suggested that schools need to reflect on their values and beliefs in order to create inclusive cultures.

**Structural frame.** Research evidence suggested that effective inclusion practices occurred when the school principal practices distributed decision-making management approach, sets general goals for high expectations, allow teachers to make most decisions as which professional development to attend, and refrain from micromanaging how teachers proceed to reach these expectancies (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2012). Some scholars suggested that when co-teaching schedules are adjusted and fixed to fit the individual needs of students, the instructional time increases (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2012). In a study carried out by Gersten and colleagues (2001), building-level support from the school principals and general education teachers was found to have strong effects on all critical aspects on special education teachers’ working conditions.

**Political frame.** McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2012), found that effective and flexible use of resources provided teachers with critical support to improve academic performances of their students. The authors argued that effective inclusion practices involve allocating more resources to early grade levels to enable students to acquire basic academic skills. Although the pressure is on schools to demonstrate high academic performance on standardized assessments of all students (IDEA, 2004, NCLB Act of 2001), some school leaders and teachers stood fast to maintain an equitable distribution of scarce resources in their schools and refused to prioritize spending based on programs that are specifically designed to enhance test performance (Hehir & Katzman, 2012).
**Human resource frame.** In a recent study conducted by Bargerhuff (2014) on inclusive elementary schools and those who lead them, the recommendations relative to the implementation of a successful inclusion program included ethics of caring, sufficient time for teachers to collaborate, access to resources, ongoing dialogue between general educators and other intervention specialists, the development of a shared vision, and infusing knowledge of inclusive practices into their curricula.

**The trends of inclusion**

The conversation about the inclusion is no longer concerned with concepts such as mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion concepts. The debate is now focused on inclusive education, a redefining of the ability and normalcy, and it is moving toward the idea of reframing inclusion (Sailor, 2002). One of the objectives of this investigation is to refocus the discussion on positive practices that lead to the implementation of an inclusion program that benefits all students. Providing for an increasingly diverse student population in an inclusive classroom will require the reforming of the current classification system, making changes in current knowledge, skills, attitudes, and understanding of the staff in the organizational relationship of the school (Passow, 1986; Reschly, 1987).

**Inclusive education.** In the context of *No Child Left Behind* (2002), issues of access and progress in the general education curriculum content for students with disabilities alongside their peers are becoming of utmost concern (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). Current common practices in most school districts in relation to servicing students with disabilities show that special education teachers generally spend about two hours in each classroom that was assigned to them. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) argued that inclusive education
work must not focus on access and participation in general education classroom, but rather on access, participation, and outcome for students who have endured marginalization due to their ability level. Inclusive education, as Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw, and McDonals (2006) explained, is a process of responding to individual differences within the structures and processes that are available to all children rather than separate from them. Florian (2008) argued that the important question is how to support teachers in developing knowledge, beliefs, practices and confidence to know what to do when their students are experiencing difficulties in learning and to reject the notion that learning disabilities experienced by some students are tragic because they are abnormal. Regardless of school structures and their positions within them, teachers are free to think differently about the nature of the problem of learning difficulties and the responses that they might make when students encounter barriers to learning (Ainscow, Dyson, & Booth, 2006; Black-Hawkins, Florian, & Rouse, 2007; Hart, Drummond, & McIntire, 2004; O’Hanlon, 2003; Skidmore, 2004). Thousand, Nevin, and Villa (2007) suggested different models of collaborative teaching to replace the concept of ability with a view of learning difficulties as problems of teaching to be solved by teachers. Peters and Reid (2006) collected examples of activities they called discursive practices that educators are developing in the hope of disrupting and challenging beliefs about normalcy concept and to bring necessary changes in thinking and practice. They suggested that teachers should focus on the objectives to be learned rather than on what is wrong with the learner. That is the emphasis should be on the strategies and not on different teaching approaches.

**Rethinking the ability/normalcy concept.** There has been an emerging literature that addresses ways to replace the determinism views of ability/disability that dominated the
educational landscape of the 20th century (Hart, 1996; Hart, Drummond, & McIntire, 2004, 2007). Florian (2008) claimed that one important reason for the continuation of special education is that school systems are utilitarian in structure and are organized around the discredited, but widely-held idea, that intelligence is fixed, measurable, and normally distributed. Skrtic (2011) pointed out that the functionalist’s view of special education explains that the failure of public schools to educate a child is the result of the child’s disability as opposed to the quality of instruction or other factors based solely in the school environment. Hehir (2002) argued that “ableist” assumptions cause harm, for services provided to children with disabilities focus inordinately on changing the disability instead of providing these students with high quality education in inclusive settings. Many researchers are calling in favor of a process teaching approach instead of a diagnostic-learning model arguing that learning is a holistic activity in which the salient educational differences are found in learners’ responses to tasks, rather than in the medical diagnostic criteria that have been used to categorize students in order to determine their eligibility for additional support (Kershner, 2000; Florian & Kershner, in press; Kavale, 2007). The diagnostic-perspective to teaching those who experience learning difficulties is lacking evidence (Ysseldyke, 2001).

Reframing inclusion. Although literature reported that over the past five decades, the field of special education has achieved numerous gains in providing students with disabilities the support they need in schools (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Kavale & Mostert, 2003; Skrtic, 1995), the structure and the organization of the special education model, as we know it, have been the center of criticism. Many scholars questioned the very existence of a dual-system of special and general education
and suggested a reconstruction of a unified education system where all children learn (UNESCO, 1994). Some scholars asserted that the special education approach perpetuates isolation and discrimination of students with special needs (Skrtic, 1995), that the special education model is the reflection of an outdated thinking relative to servicing students with disabilities (Kavale, 2007; Thomas, 2008), and it is the representation of ineffective organizational structures of public education (Skrtic, 1996). Florian (2007) stated that that the structural problems of the past need not determine the future. Increasingly educators are suggesting that separate systems of education need to be merged together to create a unified system of education that can meet the learning needs of all students (Lupart, 2012). According to the National Down Syndrome Society, (2012), the academic service delivery relative to students with disabilities has expanded beyond special education general education concept and has become part of the total school reform movement which calls for a full inclusive education. Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000a) pointed out that the main challenge with the mainstreaming movement was that its implementation did not take place concurrently with changes in the organization of regular education in terms of curriculum, teaching, and learning strategies. Such absence of organizational change, the authors contended, was later proven to be a major obstacle to the success of the mainstreaming program.

Operational definitions of key terms

*Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*: The cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. Appreciative Inquiry involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2011, p. 397).
Inclusion: Inclusion involves students attending the same schools as their siblings and peers, being members in the general education classrooms, having individualized and relevant learning objectives, and being provided with the necessary support to learn. (York, 1994, p.152)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): On Jan. 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This new law contains the most sweeping changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965. The act contains four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (Florida Department of Education, 2014).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures the progress of all public schools, and school districts toward enabling all students to meet the state’s academic achievement standards. AYP measurements target the performance and participation of various sub-groups based on race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and English proficiency. The goal of NCLB was to have 100 percent of students’ proficient by 2013-14 (Florida Department of Education, 2014).

Students with disabilities: According to IDEA (2004), students who have learning disabilities are those having the following: Mental retardation, hearing impairments including deafness, speech or language.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I used a qualitative inquiry to capture the perceptions which elementary school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers have about supportive practices and processes associated with the inclusion model. This qualitative inquiry is primarily inductive. Patton (2002) stated that inductive inquiry is a strategy that allows themes that are central to the purpose of the study to emerge from patterns in the cases being studied without presupposing which dimensions or themes will be important. To explore the school principals’ and teachers’ perceptions, I employed a collective case study methodology. Yin (2009) stated that case study methodology is used to investigate a phenomenon in depth in its real–life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (p.18). In this investigation the case was the perceptions of school principals and teachers. I analyzed these perceptions within the inclusion classroom setting context. It is in this setting that these perceptions and views were developed and used. Yen (2009) explained that the case could not be considered without the context. Additionally, some qualitative researchers argued that a multiple case methodology enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2006; Yin, 1994, 2009). Since practices associated with inclusion vary from school to school within the same school district (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), I employed a collective case study methodology to better understand through learning about the specificity and differing contexts of each individual case. According to Stake (2006), in-depth understanding of each case in context is the primary focus in multi-case research. In this investigation, the unit of analysis was composed of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers from three successful elementary schools.
Since the intent in this study was to discern supportive practices and processes associated with the inclusion model, I employed an *Appreciative Inquiry* approach. Literature evidence reported successful practices relative to inclusion (Cole & MacLesky, 1997; Hunt, Stub, & Alwell, 1994; Luster & Durrrett, 2003).

The intent in this study was to identify, understand, and describe practices that support the inclusion program in three high performing elementary schools. In other words, I wanted to know which practices have fostered the success of the inclusion program at these schools. Thus, in order to understand and examine what practices and processes are behind the success of the inclusion program in these schools, I used a case study method. This method enables the researcher to understand the complex real-life activities in which multiple sources of evidence were used (Patton, 2002). Additionally, I selected a case study methodology because one of the most significant reasons of this study is to increase our knowledge about practices that positively support inclusion. According to Merriam (1998), descriptive case studies are helpful in presenting meanings that can form a data base for future comparison and theory building. Patton (2002) asserted that case studies allow generalizations as that result of findings using multiple cases can lead to some form of replication.

**The researcher**

As I was writing my doctoral dissertation, I was working as a special education teacher. My role was to support the general education teachers in delivering academic instruction to students who have learning disabilities in the general classroom setting. In collaboration with the parent, the general education teachers, the school psychologist, the school counselor, and, based on the student’s academic performance and psycho-educational processing diagnosis, I elaborate
an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student who has been staffed in the special education program. Thereafter, my teaching responsibility becomes essentially focused on collaboratively designing, implementing, and monitoring the accommodations I and the general education teachers have selected for each student.

Who is doing the research affects the results (Shah, 2004). For the purpose of this study, I took both an insider and an outsider role. As an insider- inclusion teacher, I had the experience with the particularity of the context to be studied. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explained that context is rich in clues for understanding the experiences of the actors in the setting. Additionally, as a special education teacher, I am familiar with many participants’ viewpoints regarding the inclusion program. Patton (2002) stated that empathy is one of the major assets accessible to human inquiry to understanding human affairs. However, as a researcher and with respect to the group I will be investigating, I will also be an outsider, for I have never exercised the role of a school principal; nor have I had close professional contacts with school principals about the practices relative to the inclusion program. Although the schools where I conducted my research were in the same district, they were high performing schools. Burgess (1984) stated that being an outsider enables the researcher to stand back and extract materials from a research experience.

I would be close to them as an inclusion teacher and distant from them as a researcher. I will exercise self-reflection by keeping a journal to control biases and I will use member check strategy to increase accuracy of participants’ responses. The population of interest in this research included three schools’ principals, nine general education teachers, and four special education teachers who have been involved with the inclusion program for at least three
successive school years. These characteristics present potential practices and processes these educators will be implementing in the inclusion classroom.

**Sampling**

The purpose of this study was to identify supportive practices and processes associated with the inclusion program. According to available data on schools that implement inclusion, some elementary schools are more successful than others in terms of academic achievement of students with disabilities (Florida Department of Education, 2013). In this study, I included elementary schools that have been successful in implementing inclusion. Patton (2002) stated that the power of purposeful sampling consists on leading the researcher to selecting information-rich cases, which is of central importance to the purpose of the study. Yin (2013) asserted that researcher should seek sites that will provide insight on the research questions. Morse and Field (1996) used the principle of maximization, asserting that a location should be determined where the topic of study manifests itself most strongly.

However, literature does not provide sufficient information about key criteria to use to determine successful inclusive schools. Examples of successful inclusion schools are not well represented in the literature (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). Although some schools have achieved excellent outcomes for most students, including pupils with learning disabilities (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutchenson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Ushomirsky & Hall, 2010), no investigation of the schools that were inclusive and achieved excellent outcomes were conducted in the United States (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd 2012).

To remediate the lack of such knowledge, I used the existing data on schools and on students’ academic performance (Table 1), and literature on successful inclusion schools. Farrell
and colleagues (2007) identified effective inclusive elementary schools in England as follows: schools were identified inclusive if they enrolled a large number of students with disabilities relative to other characteristics of the school population, and they used students’ achievement levels based on a national assessment instrument to determine that schools were highly effective.

In regard to the first criterion, I used the amount of instructional time a student with learning disability receives in the general education classroom rather than the number of students being placed in the general education classroom setting. The 28th report to Congress by the U.S Department of Education mentioned that inclusive practices involve not only placement of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom, but also the time these students spend in these classrooms (Almazan, 2009). Hehir and Katzman (2012) stated that an inclusive school educates student with disabilities predominantly in the general education classroom setting for at least 80% of the instructional time.

In relation to Farrell and colleagues’ (2007) second criterion which emphasized academic achievement, I made no change, for state standardized achievement test data are available in most schools (Table 1). The third criterion I employed was school grades (Table 1). That is, the selected school must have consecutively earned an “A” grade for the last three school years based on students’ performance on state mandated assessments. The fourth criterion I used was based on schools that have earned the highest points on an 800 scale as determined by the Florida Department of Education. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), schools that made adequately yearly progress (AYP) were assigned a letter “A” or “F” (Education Week, 2004). Thus, in this collective case study, the four key criteria I used to identify inclusion schools were as follows:
1. The school has been servicing students with disabilities for 80% or more of the school day in the general classroom setting.

2. The *No Child Left Behind* school grade has been an “A” for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. 3. The school’s 3rd - 5th students with disabilities’ FCAT reading percentage passing scores (Achievement level ≥ 3) was above state (27%) and district (30%) averages on 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years.

4. Seven inclusion elementary schools that have earned the highest points on an 800 scale basis.

   Based on these four sampling criteria, five public elementary schools were eligible to be included in this study. Four school principals accepted my invitation to participate in this study. One school was not representative, for it has a large population of gifted and talented students as compared to traditional public elementary schools. The three participating schools were identified as School A, School B, and School C due to confidentiality reasons. These three schools were recognized by the Florida Department of Education as exemplary schools where students, including students with disabilities, excel. The recommended number of cases for consideration in a collective case study could be as few as three or as high as ten (Creswell & Yin, 2013). As evidenced in Table 1, these schools have been “A” schools for three consecutive school years (2012, 2013, and 2014). These schools earned the highest points on an 800 scale as determined by the Florida Department of Education. Students with disabilities in these schools have performed higher than the district’s and state’s averages on FCAT Reading for three consecutive school years (2012, 2013, and 2014).
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School-year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Scale (800 points)</th>
<th>SWD</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not.* According to state regulations, a score of “3” in Reading is the passing score to the next grade Level. Florida Department of Education, 2014.

**Procedures**

After I received approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I secured a second IRB from the school district’s Accountability and Assessment Department. All the required documents were delivered in person to the supervisor of this department. Upon receipt of an approval from the district’s Accountability and Assessment Assistant superintendent I sent an e-mail informing the district’s special education director and the regional superintendent about my study. They provided assistance in making the initial contact with seven school principals. Four out of seven school principals responded affirmatively. One school was not considered, for it has a large population of gifted and talented students. Success in this study was determined based on students with disabilities’ performance on standardized assessments (gifted students’ scores were not included). The school grade was one of four
criteria in selecting a school that is relevant to this study. During these initial contacts, I explained to the remaining three school principals the purpose of the study, and I shared with them the Informed Consent (Appendix A), which I clarified that they had to sign and return to me prior to the beginning of the interview. The three school principals agreed to begin scheduling interviews and classroom observation by May of 2016. I followed up with e-mails to arrange a second meeting which included teachers. I hand delivered the recruitment letter and attended to the questions of each individual participant. I also reviewed the Inform Consent document and explained the following steps that I would take to ensure confidentiality. We agreed to begin by setting our meeting schedules.

All interviews were held at the participants’ schools. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes in length. After greeting the participant and prior to each interview, I provided the interviewee with the letter of consent and I reviewed with her/him the part pertaining to the confidentiality issue. In addition, I asked the interviewee to voice any concern he/she might have regarding this study. The idea was to prevent potential reluctance to freely provide information. Following the interviews I audio recorded, I immediately begin transcribing and writing notes on the observations and questions that emerged from the first set of interviews and, I used member-checking strategy to allow participants to read the transcripts of their interviews and to ensure that these transcripts were recorded accurately and that they were credible. That is, I carried out throughout the data collection and analysis phase an ongoing communication with the participants via phone and e-mails to seek their confirmation or disconfirmation of my transcripts. I repeated the same strategy after I completed the second set of interviews. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that member-checking is the single most important strategy to fostering
the credibility of a study. Subsequent to the analysis of the interviews, I checked with the participants to test the fit of my interpretation in relation to their understanding of their own narratives. In the final stage, I gathered all the interview transcripts and began the analysis process.

**Data sources**

In this collective case study, I collected data using semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. Patton (2002) stated that qualitative findings emerge from three types of data collection: (1) in-depth open-ended interviews, (2) direct observations, and (3) written documents. Patton asserted that a researcher should use multiple sources of information, for no single source could be trusted to provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being investigated. Additionally, qualitative researchers argued that using a combination of data sources enhance data richness and depth of the inquiry (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

1. **Semi-structured interviews**

I used a semi-structured interview format, for they are the most common type of interviews used in qualitative research (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). According to Patton (2002) a semi-structured interview is one application of the qualitative inductive inquiry. He explained that semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to systematically examine and refine variations in emergent and grounded concepts. To format the questions of this interview I used a standardized open-ended interview approach. Patton (2002) explained that a standardized open-ended interview makes data analysis easier because it is possible to locate each respondent’s answer to the same question (p. 346).
As suggested by Patton (2002), the semi-structured interview questions I used with school principals, general education classroom teachers, and special education classroom teachers were organized into five categories: demographic, behavior and experience, knowledge, task, and value and opinion questions. The content of the questions, however, was grounded in the Four Frames of Leadership Theoretical Framework developed by Bolman and Deal in their book Reframing Organizations (1997). These frames look at the behavior of leaders in relationship to organizational frames pertaining to structure, symbol, human resource, and politics. Almost the same questions were used with teachers to understand whether the school principals’ answers were reflective of the school’s practices associated with inclusion, or whether they were merely words. Additionally, the interview questions for teachers were also based on the instructional differentiation framework to identify supportive practices associated with the inclusion program as implemented in the classroom. The interview topics were organized in ways that elicited answers about the nature of the supportive practices I sought to identify and describe. Although evidence from literature suggest that practices relative to inclusion differ from school to school, some scholars reported many successful practices associated with inclusion. Thus, to analyze differences and similarities regarding supportive practices I used Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames of Leadership. For example, questions related to knowledge were designed to elicit answers about how the rules, regulations, and procedures governing the delivery of services to students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom setting. The answers were analyzed under the structural frame. Questions related to values and opinions were asked to generate a holistic understanding of the participants’ personal culture and beliefs about inclusion. The answers were organized under the symbolic and cultural frame.
I conducted semi-structured interviews with school principals and teachers from three successful inclusive elementary schools. I sought to identify and describe which practices these schools engage in to successfully support their inclusion program. Although I used a semi-structured interview type as a guide, I included open-ended questions and established a relaxed atmosphere by being non-judgmental and non-committal to allow the interviewees the freedom to share their own personal experiences and stories (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The authors described the process of interviewing as a collaborative effort that produces a “mutually-created story”. Additionally, Patton (2002) pointed out that to obtain quality responses, the interviewer must listen attentively and carefully select appropriate feedback to the interviewee to signal that responses are on the right track. However, to enable the interviewee to tell his/her own story, Patton suggested that the interviewer should use presupposition questions. For example, I asked the school principals and teachers to describe what has worked in the inclusion program. This question presupposed that the interviews have had experienced with what has worked in the inclusion model. According to Patton (2002), participants are more likely to elaborate on this presupposition than to try to find out if they have had or not such an experience. Presupposition questions create rapport by assuming shared knowledge and assumptions and increase the richness and depth of the description received (Bandler & Grinder, 1975a; Kartunnen, 1973; Patton, 2002).

As I finished transcribing the audio recorded interviews, I integrated the process of member checking by telephoning and e-mailing the participants to share with them my interpretations of the data. They had the opportunity to discuss and clarify my interpretations and to contribute with additional perspectives on the issue I was investigating. I used participant
observations and document analysis to inform subsequent interviews. Patton (2002) stated that observations provide the researcher the opportunity to check on what is reported in interviews. Denzen (1970) pointed out that document analysis is often used with other qualitative research methods as a way to ensure triangulation. Additionally, I kept detailed field notes and records about my own values and assumptions in my reflective journal to make my bias visible to the reader.

2. Direct observations

I observed inclusion teachers from each of the three selected schools. In each inclusion classroom, I observed the special education teacher and the general education teacher delivering instruction during reading, math, and writing sessions. These classroom observations lasted from 60-90 minutes and were documented in my field notes. The purpose of these observations was to document the instructional approaches such as differentiated instruction design and grouping practices that were implemented in an inclusion classroom and to understand scheduling, planning, and teachers’ collaboration practices related to the inclusion model. In relation to the classroom observations I used the differentiated instruction design as a frame-work to analyze the instructional approaches and grouping strategies inclusion teachers apply in the inclusion classroom. Patton (2002) listed three advantages that direct observation presents to the researcher: (a) direct observation enables the inquirer to understand and capture the context which is paramount to building a holistic perspective; (b) It allows the observer to be open, discovery-oriented, and inductive because by being on-site, the observer has no reason to rely on prior verbal reports or written documents; and (c) provides the opportunity to notice events that may routinely escape awareness among the people who are in the setting.
3. Document analysis

In addition to semi-structured interviews and direct observations, I analyzed written documents such as School Improvement Plans (SIP), teachers’ lesson plans, and teachers’ collaborative planning notes. As a research method, document analysis is specifically applicable to qualitative case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). I sought to analyze these documents because they contain clarifications about specific instructional and administrative strategies that support inclusion. Teachers describe in their lesson plans and collaborative meetings how they differentiate instructions in an inclusion class. School principals explain in the School Improvement Plan how federal, state, and local services and programs would be coordinated and integrated in the school. Thus, I analyzed these documents to elicit meaning and understanding to developing knowledge that is related to my research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). Additionally, I employed this strategy to check data compiled from interviews and from direct observations about practices that support the inclusion model. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that documents analysis is useful for theory building, a process that requires comparative analysis. In this collective case study, I formulated the content of my semi-structured interview topics according to Bolman and Deal’s *Four Frames Theoretical Framework* to answer my research question. Bryman (1994) asserted that a multiple case study researcher needs some structure in order to ensure cross-comparability. Schein (1983) argued that it is the interviewer who is required to bring how basic assumptions are patterned to the level of consciousness of the interviewee. Subsequent to my initial interview, direct observations, and documents analysis, I became more aware of practices and processes that support the inclusion program. Some researchers reported that little is known about how schools move toward practices and processes
that support inclusion (Mamlin, 1999; Schumm, et al., 1995). Hehir and Katzman (2012) reported that Bolman and Deal’s *Four Frames of Leadership* framework approach was helpful in highlighting findings that were consistent with the promotion of practices that support inclusion. Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that effective and sustainable change occurs only when leaders address concurrently the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. Thus, supportive practices associated with the inclusion program should reflect that school teachers are provided: a. appropriate trainings (*human resource frame*); b. administrative support to engage in working collaboratively in teams and to participate in the shared decision making process (*structural frame*); c. sufficient resources to meet the specific individual learning needs of students in the inclusion classroom setting (*political frame*); and d. opportunities to celebrate diversity and to promote values that support inclusion (*symbolic/cultural frame*).

**Data analysis**

In the data analysis phase, I used thematic analysis approach because it provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data and helps the researcher to identify and report patterns or themes within the accumulated data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While I was audio-recording the interviews, I was also engaged in hand writing field notes on the context, the situational background, the respondents’ essential points, key words and phrases, and non-verbal cues. Notes taken during the interview can help the researcher to formulate new questions for subsequent interviews (Patton, 2002). That is, I transcribed my interviews based on both audio recording and handwritten field notes I took during the interviews and immediately after the interviews had ended. According to Davidson (2009), transcripts overcome the weaknesses of
field notes and that working from the recording overcomes the transcripts weaknesses. Duranti (2006) suggested that field notes, transcripts, and working from audio recording be approached as complementary methods to managing data. I analyzed field notes, recording, and transcripts using the constant comparative method (CCM). Glaser and Strauss (1967) described CCM as an iterative and inductive process of reducing the collected data through constant recoding process, whereas data are systematically compared to other data in the data set. Fram (2013) argued that CCM is a data analysis method, which allows the researcher to maintain the participant’s view as insider and to also maintain, via theoretical frameworks, the outsider’s perspective throughout the analysis.

**Research design**

I selected elementary school sites to conduct this investigation, for they have certain similarities (Stake, 2006). According to Salend (2001), in general, middle and high school teachers tend to favor inclusion less than elementary school teachers. Patton (2002) argued that information-rich cases are those from which the researcher could learn a great deal about the issue being investigated. Literature evidence suggest that practices vary from school to school and even within the same school. Additionally, as an elementary school teacher, I conducted my research at an elementary school level. Patton (2002) stated that in a qualitative inquiry, the researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (p.40). Since the focus in this study was on identifying positive practices associated with inclusion, I used an *Appreciative Inquiry* approach. My intent was to gain a greater understanding of supportive practices associated with the inclusion program through the perceptions of the elementary school principals, general education teachers, and
special education teachers.

**A collective case study.** A collective-case study methodology allows for in-depth understanding of each individual case in context (Stake, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994, 2009). In this study, I collected data from different sources about inclusion practices that support inclusion to ensure that the research question was explored from a variety of lenses and that the multiple facets of the phenomenon were revealed (Stake, 1995). Through sustained interaction with principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers, I attempted to provide a concise description of the contexts within which these participants make professional decisions regarding the inclusion model. Thus, I completed three separate study reports. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a case as a phenomenon of some sort which occurs in a bounded context. I used the constant comparative analysis method to analyze data I collected via semi-structured interviews, field notes, direct observations, and document analysis, and to identify patterns within and between these three single cases. O’Connor and colleagues (2008) stated that constant comparison assures that all data are systematically compared to all other data in the data set (p.41). In a collective case study investigation, through a constant comparative analysis, emergent patterns are identified within each case (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965, 2002), and cross-case findings are synthesized into themes (Stake, 2006).

However, Boeije (2002) argued that literature does not make clear how a researcher should apply the constant comparison analysis method. That is, researchers remain vague about the constant comparative analysis method and its practical rules. In this collective case study I interviewed 16 participants from three elementary schools. To analyze the texts that resulted from the transcription of the interviews, I used three steps from Boeije’s constant comparative
approach to interviews. These five steps were as follows:

1. **Comparing within a single interview.** I compared data within a single interview using open-coding process (Glaser, 1978). At this first level of coding I studied every passage of the interview, seeking to identify distinct concepts and categories. That is, by comparing different parts of the interview, the consistency of the entire interview was examined. The aim was to develop categories and to label them with the most appropriate code.

2. **Comparison between interviews within same group.** I made comparisons between individuals who share the same experience. In this study, the first group consisted of general education teachers, and the second group consisted of special education teachers who have shared the same experience relative to the inclusion program. I compared the general education teachers’ interviews with one another, and I proceeded in this same manner with the special education teachers’ interviews. I used different colors as a code to label each line or passage accordingly. I compared data between interviews within the same group using axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The axial coding involved: (a) confirming that identified concepts and categories from the first level of coding accurately represented interview responses and (b) exploring how these concepts and categories were related. That is, by comparing and making connections between new categories, I was able to further develop new concepts, and discovered new themes (Boeije, 2002).

3. **Comparison of interviews from different groups within the same school.** I compared data between interviews of special education teachers, general education teachers, and school principal, which provided a rich understanding and deep insights about interviews from each group (Stake, 2006). Data were analyzed to examine consistencies and differences among these
participants. It is important to give data triangulation a central place in qualitative analysis (Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991).

Stake (2006) defined multiple-case studies as being investigations of a particular phenomenon (or group of phenomena) at a number of different sites. According to Stewart (2012), multiple-case study methods are not easy to implement in the field, and little guidance in the methodology exists in literature as to how to conceptualize and implement good quality in this respect. Stake (2006) proposed that the researcher should not put too much emphasis on attributes of individual cases when sampling and should carefully weigh (a) the relevance of the individual case to the primary research question, (b) consider whether the case provides diversity across contexts, and (c) determine if the case offers opportunities to have access to insight into the complexity and the context of the issue.

Stake (2006) stated that although the collective case recommends most of the attention, a multi-case researcher should work vigorously to understand each particular case. In other words, I brought out the details from the viewpoint of the participants in each case by using multiple sources of data. That is, I focused on understanding the particularity of each case prior to merging in the collective case. Thus, to maintain a balanced approach between the collective case and the single cases, I followed Stake’s procedures by first selecting cases which have similarities. Second, I used cross-case dialectic method to maintain the uniqueness of each case and to avoid merging into the collective case too soon. Stake described this case study method as a rhetorical, adversarial procedure, wherein attention to the local situations and attention to the program or phenomenon as a whole contend with each other for emphasis (p. 46). In other words, I worked on each single case while keeping the collective case in the back of my mind.
Sedtoecker (1991) argued that a multiple-case study risks reducing complex cases to a few comparable variables result in the loss of the idiosyncrasies of each individual case.

**Summary**

In this collective case study, I used the constant comparative analysis method (CCM) to analyze data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that CCM is an iterative and inductive process of reducing the data through constant recoding. In the coding stages, I applied the three steps Boieje (2002) suggested in her constant comparative method of interview transcripts. As I completed the open coding for 16 interviews I immediately began writing the first case report (Patton, 2002). I repeated the same open coding cycle for the remaining interviews. Once I completed the open coding for the interview transcripts and wrote a report case for each single case, I proceeded to the second stage which involved comparing findings between interviews using axial coding. Axial coding involves putting data back together and making connections between categories to develop new concepts and to discover new themes, clusters, or typologies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I conducted a cross-case analysis based on the themes that emerged during the axial coding process (Stake, 2006). In the third stage, I compared data from the interviews of different groups (general education teachers, special education teachers, and school principals) to enrich and deepen the understanding of the information provided by each group from each single case.

**Credibility**

Judging the quality of any research, regardless of its nature, type, or scale of measurement, requires criteria. *Credibility* flows from those judgments (Patton, 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility refers to the extent to which data are plausible,
credible, and trustworthy, and thus can be defended when challenged. Lincoln and Guba argued that credibility is one of the most important factors to establishing trustworthiness. However, as Williams and Morrow (2009) explained, the criteria for establishing the credibility of a study vary across different traditions. Some qualitative researchers use credibility, dependability, and transferability as criteria to determine the trustworthiness of their investigation (Carcary, 2009). Other researchers refute the dependability/reliability criterion arguing that it jeopardizes the credibility of a study (Sandelowski, 1993). Some qualitative research scholars often reject the idea of generalizability/transferability, while many others persist on implying how their findings might be used outside of the settings in which they were originally inferred (Finfgeld-Connett, 2010). I enhanced soundness and trustworthiness of this qualitative case study by using two approaches of Lincoln and Guba (1985): (a) credibility (as opposed to internal validity of quantitative research) and (b) transferability (as opposed to external validity of quantitative research), which is concerned with the extent to which findings of one study could be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Consistent with all research traditions, the ability to generalize/transfer findings from one context to another is grounded in validity/credibility (Ruddin, 2006). Thus, to ensure the trustworthiness of this investigation, I applied the credibility and the transferability approaches. I supported each approach by using different techniques. Houghton, Casey, and Shaw (2012) suggested prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking as strategies to ensure the credibility of a multiple case study. In regard to the transferability approach, they recommended the use of thick description strategy. The credibility and transferability techniques I used in relation to this study were performed as follows:
Credibility techniques

To demonstrate the *credibility* of this collective case study, I applied the following strategies throughout the investigation process: (1) *prolonged engagement*, (2) *triangulation*, (3) *member-checking*, (4) *frequent debriefing sessions*, (5) *reflexivity*, and (6) *the examination of previous research findings*. In regard to the *transferability* criterion, I employed two strategies: (1) *thick description* and (2) *audit trail* techniques.

1. **Prolonged engagement**: At each school I spent six weeks collecting data by preliminary visits to each school to meet the participants in this study and to gain a trusting relationship with each one of them. Once on site, I took the time to consult the appropriate documents regarding the inclusion program such as the School Improvement Plans, teachers’ schedules and lesson plans. In subsequent visits, I completed eight hours of direct observations at each of the three school sites. Patton (2002) suggested that establishing the existence of certain levels of program operations at different sites could be accomplished by making brief visits to these locations. Additionally, I completed a set of interviews with 16 participants. Each interview lasted 60 minutes. That is, I spent about 15 hours interviewing and 32 hours conducting direct classroom observations to gain a full understanding of the critical contributions the school principal and teachers perceive supportive to the inclusion model. My interviews and classroom observations ended as I reached a point where I was no longer collecting new data that could shed any further light on the research question I was investigating. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that in such event the researcher has reached a point of saturation where the gathering of additional data could be unproductive.

2. **Triangulation**: Patton (2002) reported four types of triangulation: (a) *triangulation of sources*, (b) investigator /analyst triangulation, (c) *theoretical triangulation*, and (d)
methodological triangulation. In this collective case study, I applied the triangulation of sources technique by collecting data from three different schools and from three different stake-holders groups (general education teachers, special education teachers, and school principals). Yin (2009) stated that the credibility of a case study increases when a researcher triangulates data to demonstrate that the events of a case have been supported by more than one single source of data. Additionally, I employed methodological triangulation by collecting data via semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple data collection sources provides a more convincing and accurate case study (Casey & Houghton, 2010; Yin, 1994). Patton (2002) explained that multiple data collection methods enable the researcher to understand not only the emergence of similar patterns but also the inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data which reinforces the credibility of the results.

According to Guba (1981) the use of different methods to collect data compensates for individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. Eisner (1991) stated that by triangulating data, the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility (p.291). I implemented theoretical triangulation by using different theoretical lenses: (a) Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames framework to conceptualize the cases, (b) Differentiated Instruction Frame to conduct classroom observation, and (c) Boeije’s Constant Comparative frame to analyze the texts that resulted from the interviews. I also used analyst triangulation strategy by consulting with all the participants in this study.

3. Member-checking: Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that this strategy is the single most important provision that can be made to foster a study’s credibility. I used telephoning, mailing, and face-to-face consultations with two participants from each site to check the
accuracy of the data I collected from the interviews, field notes, classroom observations, and document analysis. The process of cross-checking helped me to render my bias visible, and it also provided the participants a say in validating the findings. Through the participant’s feedback, I was able to discover new questions, challenges, and interests. Charmaz (2006) suggested that member-checking provides an opportunity to further explore the tensions and the complexity of the proposed interpretation. Additionally, by providing the participants the opportunity to read the transcription of their interviews to ensure that these transcripts have been accurately recorded and, thus, credible (Altheide & Johnson 1994; Cormack 2000; Sandelwoski 1993; Stake 2006).

4. Frequent debriefing sessions: Early on in the research process, through ongoing discussions with the chair of my advisory committee and its members, I was able to redefine my research topic, to clarify the research question, and to select the appropriate research design and methodology. The questions of committee members who were overseeing my doctoral dissertation have been extremely valuable in supporting my doctoral research in which I was working independently rather than on a team. Through our discussions, I gained a wider vision about my investigation. Their suggestions during the many debriefing sessions provided me the opportunity to recognize my own biases and preferences and, thus, to discuss other alternatives and methods to deepen my analysis. At later stages of my research endeavor, the members of my advisory committee were also instrumental in guiding me through discussion as how to address flaws and how to refine my inquiry.

5. Reflexivity. Being part of the research instruments, the credibility of a study rests on the procedures implemented and the self-awareness of the researcher throughout the research
process (Cowles, 1993; Rodgers & Mantzoukas, 2005; Stoeker, 1991). To increase the credibility of this study, I used reflexivity as a strategy. Hertz (1997) explained that to be reflexive is to undertake an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it. This ongoing self-monitoring have made me, as a researcher, aware of my own bias. Patton (2002) suggested that being reflective makes researcher’s bias explicit. One of the techniques I performed to keep my bias on check was a memo writing (Charmaz, 2006) which I maintained throughout the data collection and analysis stages. In this memo, I explained the rationale for the decisions I made, and the instincts and personal challenges I met at each stage of the process (refer to the discussion of this point in chapter 3). I recorded my thoughts and reactions as I was conducting interviews, observations, and reading transcripts. I proceeded in the same fashion while I was using memos in N-Vivo. The thoughts and ideas I documented during data collection stage helped me in the development of themes and subthemes. It was important that decision trails were not stripped off the personal contributions of the researcher (Jasper, 2005).

6. Examination of previous research findings: I used this strategy to assess the degree to which this investigation’s results were congruent with those of the previous studies which addressed comparable issues. Research provides clear evidences about the critical contributions some school leaders make to support the inclusion program. Schools that have successfully restructured into inclusive environments identified collaborative teams, teaming, and group-decision making process as key elements school leaders reinforce to implementing inclusion successfully (Sage & Burello, 1994, Thousand & Villa, 1992;). In this study, I described supportive practices associated with the inclusion model, and I compare them with those of other similar studies which had covered similar issues.
Paton (2002) explained that *credibility* requires rigorous methods throughout all the stages of the study. Fossey and colleagues (2002) pointed out that methodological rigor refers to good practices in the conduct of the research such as how the case was designed and how data were collected and analyzed. Thus, in addition to the *credibility* techniques that I used in this study, I sought schools where I found rich and in-depth data that were instrumental in exploring the research questions. That is, I selected only few successful inclusive elementary schools to describe positive practices relative to inclusion. In qualitative research, it is the richness of the cases rather than the size of the sample that fosters the credibility of an investigation (Patton, 2002). In relation to data collection, I interviewed three school principals and twelve inclusion teachers about supportive practices relative to inclusion as an educational service model. I conducted direct observation at three schools to understand how teachers collaborate with each other and how they attend to the needs of all students in their classroom, and I examined teachers’ lesson plan and collaborative plans, and the schools improvement plans. Yin (1994) stated that a multiple data collection sources provides a more convincing and accurate case study.

**Transferability**

The second criterion I employed in this study to demonstrate its soundness and trustworthiness was *transferability*. Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained *transferability* as the ability to generalize the findings within and beyond the context of the study. Merriam (1998) explained *transferability* as the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other settings or contexts. The researcher, according to some scholars, is responsible for providing detailed description to allow the reader to make informed
decisions as whether to transfer one study to another (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Farrelly (2013) reported that although, from a qualitative perspective, applying the findings transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing generalization, the qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research question. Additionally, Bassey (1981) proposed that if practitioners believe that their situations are similar to that described in a study, they may relate the findings to their own situations. One of the techniques that Houghton and colleagues (2012) used in their multiple case study to foster its transferability was thick description. Thus, in this collective case study, I used (a) thick description and (b) audit trail strategies to foster its transferability.

Transferability techniques

1. **Thick description:** Patton (2002) stated that thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting. In this collective case study, I included detailed descriptions about practices the school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive as supportive to the inclusion program. Through detailed description and rich quotations, I brought the reader to the setting being described (Peshkin, 1986). Additionally, I explained the research methods I used, and I included examples of raw data so that the reader can readily consider their interpretations (Dawson, 2009; Popay et al., 1998; Stake, 1995). Without such an insight, it is difficult for the reader to make informed decisions about the credibility of the findings (Shenton, 2004). Some qualitative researchers argued that generalization is not simply determined by the number of the subjects (Firestone, 1993; Lazaraton, 1995; Silverman, 1993) suggested that the most useful generalization in qualitative
studies are analytic, not sample-to-population. Additionally, Yin (2009) argued that the goal in case study research should be to generalize—not to population, but to theories. Thus, it was important to emphasize that the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize statistical significance but to ensure appropriate representation of the study’s events and on understanding the key issues under investigation (Yin, 2003).

**2. Audit trail:** In developing an audit trail, the researcher provides an account of all research decisions and activities throughout the study process (Yin 2009). That is, in order to facilitate the transferability of the findings of one study to another, the original context of the research must be adequately described so that judgments could be made (Koch, 1994). Many researchers recommend the development of a research audit trail to establish a study’s trustworthiness (Koch, 2006; Yin 2009). Carcary (2013) argued that an audit trail enables readers to trace through a researcher’s logic and determine whether the study’s findings may be relied upon as a platform for further inquiry and as a basis for decision making. Thus, to maintain a well-documented audit trail throughout this collective case study, I implemented Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) six categories of information they recommended in order to collect and to inform the audit process: (a) raw data, (b) data reduction and analysis notes, (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products, (d) process notes, (e) materials related to intention and dispositions, and (f) preliminary development information. In this audit trail, I included copious notes about report retrieval, tracking, and selection. Through examining of this information, a researcher can better determine whether the study’s finding are grounded in the data and whether the inferences are logical (Akkerman, Admiral, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008).

Although I used a relatively small purposeful sampling in this collective case study, it
was not impossible to generalize/transfer from a single case (Flyvberg, 2011). Yin (2009) argued that the goal in a case study research should be to generalize, not to population, but to theories. Patton (2002) stated that the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases, in order to illuminate the questions under investigation. Remenyi and colleagues (1998) explained that a detailed understanding of the issues in a particular case can form the basis for better understanding of those issues in other similar settings. Additionally, Koch (1994) asserted that in order to determine transferability, the original context must be adequately described so that judgment can be made as whether to transfer the findings to another context.

In sum, in this investigation, I used a qualitative research methodology, and I employed a collective case study design to identify and understand practices that support the inclusion. I gathered data on these practices via semi-structured interviews, persistent and prolonged classroom observations, and documents analysis. At the data analysis stage, I applied the constant comparative approach to identify patterns and differences between cases (Fram, 2013; Glasser & Strauss, 1967). I used credibility and transferability approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as the framework to foster the soundness and trustworthiness of this qualitative case study (Houghton et al., 2012). Throughout this research process, I implemented specific strategies such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, member-checking, frequent debriefing sessions, reflexivity, the examination of previous research findings, thick description, and audit trail techniques to ensure a sound and rigorous implementation of this study. The procedures I followed in this collective case study improved my understanding about practices that were perceived as supportive to inclusion. This understanding, which was generated from the words and actions of the school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers,
was to inform educational policy makers and practitioners to focus on positive practices pertaining to inclusion as an educational service delivery model that benefits all students, including students with disabilities.

**Ethical considerations**

This study was conducted in a manner consistent with the 2015 guidelines for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Florida. No known risks were present for participants that were greater than the potential benefit the participant may derive from contributing to the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). All expectations and conditions for participation were outlined in the Informed Consent document (Appendix A) and explained in details in the recruitment letter.

Confidentiality was upheld in reporting through the use of pseudonyms assigned by the researcher for the school district, schools, and participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The associated names were saved on a Master List which I stored in the University digital storage that was provided by the Chair of my Committee. There was potential that participants might have thought that honest disclosure of their engagement with this investigation may lead to a negative professional image. I addressed this eventuality by assuring participants that individual information was not to be with other participants in the school or other schools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to identify, describe, and understand practices and processes that elementary school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to be supportive to the inclusion program. The ontological assumption in this study was based on the notion that reality is defined through the participants’ eyes (Stake, 2006).

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the completed collective case study. In the first section I provided an overview of the study. In the second section, I offered an overview of data collection and analysis. In the third section, I presented demographic data about the school district, schools, and participants. I then followed with two major sections: 1. Findings on each case and 2. Cross-case analysis. For confidentiality reasons I used pseudonyms to identify each case and each entity involved in this study.

Overview of the Study

Initially, the central question to this research was: Which practices, processes, school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to be supportive to the inclusion program? Since the qualitative research paradigm is characterized by the emergence of questions during the data collection and analysis processes (Roberts, 2010), five research questions emerged:

RQ1: What are the values and beliefs of school principals and inclusion teachers?

RQ2: How do inclusion teachers and school principals support each other to implement the inclusion program?

RQ3: Which structural practices support the inclusion program?
RQ4: How does the school principal support her/his inclusion teachers?

RQ5: Which inclusive instructional practices do teachers use in an inclusion classroom?

To answer these questions, I used a multiple case study design. Case study allows the use of multiple data sources to ensure a broader consideration of multiple perspectives and to enhance the rigor of the study as well (Stake, 2006). I examined the perceptions of teachers and school principals within and across the three participating elementary schools using multiple data sources: (a) one-on-one interviews with school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers, (b) classroom observations, and (c) document analysis. Additionally, I kept a research journal to document important decisions related to this investigation and to reflect on the ways the study was evolving (Creswell, 2013).

**Interviews with school principals and teachers.** One of the main forms of data I collected was based on semi-structured interviews I used to interview school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. These participants have been involved with the inclusion program for three school years or more. The interview questions I used consisted of semi-structured questions pertaining to practices and processes that support the inclusion model (Appendices, C, D, and E). An overview of the interview topics is displayed under Appendix B.

**Classroom observations.** The second form of data collection was the classroom observations. The intent was to triangulate these observations with the participants’ responses and to document the inclusive instructional practices teachers are using in their inclusion classrooms. In these observations, as a non-participant observer, I recorded descriptive and reflexive notes about the instructional approaches; notably differentiation of instruction and
accommodations. I used a classroom observation checklist to guide me through the observation process (Appendix F).

**Document analysis.** I reviewed each school’s improvement plan (SIP) available at its websites which provides a more comprehensive understanding of the learning objectives, and the delivery of services that are or are not available to students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Additionally, I analyzed teachers’ lesson plans and collaborative plans from inclusion teachers to document collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Each document was coded using open coding. Code families were developed for each case study (N=16). These documents were connected to the appropriate case. The results I obtained from document analysis were included in the individual case studies and the cross-case analysis.

**Overview of data analysis**

After I completed 16 interviews, each recorded interview was played back several times to allow me to take notes on initial categories and themes. The purpose was to determine the utility of the case relative to answering the research question. I then transcribed each interview which I sent to each participant for member checking. As I received participants’ feedback I began analyzing each transcript word by word and line by line. I used multiple colors to code different parts of the interviews as they relate to the entire story (open coding). After the open coding was completed for one single interview, I wrote a complete case report (Patton, 2002) for that particular case. I repeated the same process for the remaining 15 case reports. After I completed the open coding and wrote a report for each case study, I proceeded by comparing findings between interviews using axial coding (Straus & Corbin, 1998). I followed Boeije’s

**Credibility techniques.** The credibility techniques I used in this investigation were (a) cross-stakeholder and cross-methodological triangulation, (b) triangulation of sources (i.e., interviews, observations, and document analysis), thick description (Patton 2002), (d) member checking, (f) peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and (g) reflexive journaling through memo writing (Charmaz, 2006). The findings from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were integrated into case reports and cross-case analysis.

**Overview of the framework**

Within the school context as a professional bureaucracy where work is divided among specialists, grade-level teachers, and support staff (Skrtic, 1991), the inclusion program was defined, throughout this study, as a service delivery and organizational model. Recent debate on inclusion has been focused on the programming, organization, and delivery of services to student with disabilities in an inclusion school (Ainscow et al., 2006; Alberta Education, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; McLeskey, Rosenberg & Westling, 2013). Consistent with this organizational paradigm, I used Bolman and Deal’s *Organizational Theoretical Frame Work* (2008) to investigate the research question. According to this theoretical framework, a change in any organization is effective only to the extent that its leaders concurrently confront the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The second framework I used to analyze the inclusiveness of instruction was based on Differentiation of Instruction (Hall, 2002).
To make sense of data I collected from interviews and to bring structure to the data analysis, I used the organizational theoretical framework developed by Bolman and Deal (1997). That is, the responses of school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers relative to practices and processes that support the inclusion program were examined from: (a) structural frame, (b) human resource frame, (c) political frame, and (d) symbolic frame. After reviewing all the transcripts, I developed codes which were then clustered into themes. These themes were then mapped onto the theoretical framework of Bolman and Deal. All quotes in Chapters 4 and 5 were selected because they represent major themes. To ensure triangulation, I also relied on classroom observations, documents analysis, and field notes.

**Presentation of demographics**

I examined the demographics of school district and the three elementary public schools where I conducted this study to understand whether there was an over-representation or under-representation of students with disabilities. As evidenced in Table 2, Schools’ demographics, I found no significant disproportionate representation in these schools. In the 2013-2014 school year, the percentage of students with disabilities at the school district level was 13.7%.

**School district.** In 2015, there were 197 public schools in this school district. 103 of these schools were elementary schools. During the 2013-2014 school year, 56,668 elementary school students were enrolled in 103 schools. Among these students, 44.3% were African Americans, 37.8% were Caucasians, 9.8% Hispanics, 4.7% Asians, and 0.2% Native Americans. About 4.2% of students were English Learners and about 13.7% of students were students with disabilities (County Public Schools’ Business Services, 2013). According to Heartland Payment
Systems, Inc., in 2013-2014, about 50.2% of public schools in the district provided their students free and reduced breakfast and lunch.

**Schools.** The education of students with disabilities in these schools occurred primarily in the general education classroom setting (80% or more of the school day). Some students who have speech/language or occupational therapy needs leave their general education classroom only for a limited time to receive specialized interventions. The demographics of the school district and that of the three selected public elementary schools are exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2

2013-2014 School Demographics by Percentage (N=3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learners</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunch</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1089</td>
<td>56,668</td>
<td>135,741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* An asterisk (*) indicates a subgroup population of fewer than ten. F.D.O.E, 2014.

**Participants.** The total number of the population of interest in this investigation was 16. Three school principals, nine general education teachers, and four special education teachers. They all have been involved in the inclusion program for at least three consecutive school years. Giorgi (2009) recommended that the task of the researcher was to select a participant who reported having had a specific experience with the phenomenon. All participants were involved
throughout data collection and analysis process as I used member checking strategy to increase the credibility of this study. For the purpose of maximum variation in sampling (Creswell, 2007), I strived to have a mix of gender, race, and experience levels. However, the majority of participants from the selected elementary schools were Caucasian females because this was representative of the majority of elementary school teachers in the selected district for this study. As evidenced in table 3, all the selected schools’ demographics portray a majority of Caucasian females.

Table 3

Demographics of Participants (N=16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Incl. Expr.</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>SPLA</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>K-5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET1A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET2A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET3A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET4A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed.Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET5A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPT1A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spec.Ed.Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPT2A</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spec.Ed.Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>SPLB</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>K-5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M.A.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET1B</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GED2B</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPT1B</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.Tr.</td>
<td>K-3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>B.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>SPLC</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>K-5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M.A.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET1C</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>B.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET2C</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Gen.Ed. Tr.</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPT1C</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spec.Ed.Tr.</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Teaching Experience in an Inclusion Setting is reported in number of years.
Findings on Each Case

The semi-structured interview sessions allowed school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers from School A, School B, and School C to freely articulate their thoughts and feelings about practices they perceive as supportive to the inclusion program. To ensure confidentiality to each participating entity in this study, the identification of each case was based on a combination of the participant’s and school’s pseudonyms, and a single digit number.

Case 1- School Principal A1 (SPLA1)

The school principal I interviewed from School A (SPLA1) is a white female. She has been a school principal for 13 years. All the schools she led were inclusion schools. SPLA1 was the School A’s principal for nine years. She holds a Master’s in Administrative Leadership and a Bachelor’s in Special Education.

Values and beliefs. SPLA1 shared a positive vision about the inclusion program. She described this program to be the reflection of a team work which works at its best when the general education teacher and the special education teacher are provided the necessary time.

The ESE teacher comes in, in a sense, to co-teach with the general education teacher so that both teachers are facilitating and both teachers are teaching and they work as a team...I think both teachers need to teach as a co-teaching situation to help all students- It would be ideal to have both special education and general education teachers spend half of the day together.

SPLA1 believed that the inclusion setting does benefit students, for they are instructed by two teachers who possess different instructional strategies.
Two teachers who understand strategies that are good for all students—so that children can benefit.

SPLA1 shared her efforts relative to promoting a positive attitude about the inclusion program. It is worth noting that not all teachers and parents have a positive attitude about the inclusion program. SPLA1 explained that she models to her teachers how to include all students in all aspects of the school activities.

We include our students with learning disabilities in our celebrations, they receive awards...They are part of the awards assemblies. We do not discriminate. Matter of fact, I could not even go and say, well that is an ESE child and that’s not because they are all blended and...So I think that speaks volumes of the teacher and of the children because they do not stand out. So to me they are all celebrated along with the other children.

**Human resource practices.** SPLA1 acknowledged that she encourages her teachers to talk to her when they are stressed or faced with any concern that might interfere with their job and that she has an open door policy for the purpose of accommodating her teachers and staff.

Teachers know where to find me if they need help. Professional development supports teachers, which in return supports the children so I feel like having a highly trained ESE teacher and a general education teacher that understand the ESE population for this to be successful…When it comes to training, teachers need to have the latest and the greatest knowledge.

SPLA1 described the training available to her school by the school district as supportive.
We even have a site coach here at our school. During our early release, many of our general education teachers and special education teachers can receive the training from a certified ESE professional at the school...I feel like we receive support from the district, our behavior interventionists-they come into help lead, or facilitate, some of our MRT or IEP meetings. So I really do feel like when we do need the support from the district, there are several different individuals who come in to help with individual students or groups of students or even help with the teachers.

SPLA1 reported that she is aware of the time sensitivity regarding the deadlines associated with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) review and that she makes sure that here teachers know that her door is always open to them when they need time to update their students’ IEPs.

When teachers come to me stressed and they say they need time, they said we have all this to do, then giving them a substitute, so that they can get their work done, just like as a regular teacher. So, giving them that time. I think the time is the most important.

**Structural practices.** SPLA1 described how she fosters collaboration between her teachers.—And how she ensures that they have the time they need to plan and collaborate. She stated that,

Our inclusion teachers are embedded to all common planning with our general education teachers, giving them time to plan, providing the early release day time, making sure that our ESE teachers are involved with planning with our general education teachers...Ok, best support that I have provided was time. I think they deserve time, if needed, to write IEPs, then planning time.
SPLA1 mentioned the importance of having teachers trained in reading the rules and procedures involved with the implementation of a student’s Individual Educational Plan (IEP),

Teachers should be trained as far as how to correctly write an Individual Education Plan (IEP), how to read it, and most importantly, how to implement an IEP to make sure that the child is receiving the most support in the least restrictive environment.

SPLA1 explained that some students with learning disabilities could benefit from a pull-out program.

There are some of those children that do need to be pulled out and have that one-on-one or small group, not in the classroom because of these children realize they are struggling, and they feel more comfortable in a smaller setting….We need to support children who fall in between.

**Leadership and resources.** SPLA1 recognized that her background in special education helped her to implement the inclusion program successfully.

…My background on special education helps me to implement inclusion successfully.

SPLA1 reported that when she calls the district for additional teachers due to the increase of students attending her school, she does receive help.

We do need to look at a lower ratio because we do have a large population. We could use four teachers, but budget sometimes does not allow it, but I do think that [district] once we contact them, and they do take that into consideration; they try to get the employees here. I think the district sends the support out.

SPLA1 reported that teachers have all the materials they need.
Oh yes, I think that we have the materials that we need. They have the space, they have the computers. I feel that they have basically what they need as far as teacher’s edition, and if they don’t, I know my teachers will share.

**Summary**

The school principal I interviewed from School A, SPLA1 explained that the inclusion program works at its best when general education teacher and special education teacher co-teach for at least half of the school day. She shared that as a leader, she models a positive attitude about inclusion. SPLA1 described her human resource practices to be centered on supporting her teachers in terms of both the training and the allocation of time to plan and collaborate. SPLA1 described her structural approach to the inclusion program to be based on designating a low teacher-student ratio classroom and on making sure teachers know how to read, write, and implement an IEP. SPLA1 shared that she supports her teachers by making sure they have all the materials they need for their classroom.

**Case 2- General Education Teacher A1 (GETA1)**

The first general education teacher I interviewed from School A (GETA1) is a white female who has been involved with the inclusion program for 10 years. She is currently a 4th grade Language Arts teacher. GETA1 earned a Bachelor’s in Journalism, and she transitioned to teaching through the alternative certification program that was offered by her school district. GETA1 was friendly and open about her beliefs in relation to the inclusion program. It is worth noting that the focus in this study was on identifying positive practices pertaining to the inclusion program.
Values and beliefs. GETA1’s vision about an inclusion classroom was to work on a full day basis with a special education teacher.

Every inclusion classroom would have a full time ESE teacher for support. Having a full-time ESE teacher in every inclusion classroom would be ideal. I think that would eliminate –it would just make –it would facilitate amazing results [laughs]. GETA1 explained that inclusion classroom is the appropriate setting for students with disabilities because they benefit from socialization with peers.

Socialization is number one because I have found that every-no matter what disability I am dealing with socialization is tied into every disability for lot of different reasons. The socialization and the interaction with general education students is probably. It benefits both sides. The tolerance, understanding, compassion, and just learning proper social skills. You know depending on both sides.

GETA1 shared that at her school they have a lot of celebrations for all students, including students with disabilities.

We have a reading celebration every year. Students from different grade levels are recognized for reading achievement. Our PTA is very active in our school and does a lot of extracurricular things. Our music and art teachers offer free lessons to-every student-if there were inclusion students that produce some art that they wanted displayed.

Human resource practices. GAET1 reported that the administration support was positive.
We have a very good morale at this school and we support each other. So over time just because of the morale and support, we are very much like a family. We respect each other, so it kind of just natural. It is one of those things that naturally falls in place.

GETA1 explained that she feels supported by her school principal.

Well, she is always receptive. If you have concern or a suggestion, she is very receptive, so you are always comfortable to go and ask her for help….She is very easy to work with.

GETA1 described the support she gets from her school principal in terms of training,

I took several classes in differentiation of instruction, which was important, because that is the number one thing. I have taken professional development classes dealing with children with different disabilities. I have taken autistic professional development classes that focus specifically on the autistic spectrum. I have taken several ESOL classes which also implement learning strategies that cross over into children with learning disabilities.

GETA1 mentioned that she also gets support from the regular education teachers and that she has a positive work related relationship with her peer special education teacher. She sees flexibility in scheduling as key to maintaining positive communication.

They are willing to push in to the classroom when needed. They are willing to pull children out for, you know, special testing circumstances. They are very flexible. That is probably number one. Also I know on my grade level we have excellent collaboration.

GETA1 described her collaboration with her peer teachers, stating,
We meet regularly. We have common planning time. We also meet with our assistant principal once a week…We forecast what is coming up, what we need to focus on, so we plan.

**Structural practices.** GETA1 reported that she appreciated the opportunity her school principal provides to inclusion teachers to come up with their own schedule and procedure to distribute students with disabilities across several classrooms and how to accommodate their needs.

So I have always been an advocate of distributing the inclusion students across the grade level. Not just in one classroom, because we are all inclusion teachers...Every classroom has to come up with a schedule, and we try to coordinate with our, whoever our ESE support teacher is for the grade level...We have to schedule with her, whatever that accommodates the different students. We also try to group students together into different classrooms that have the same service needs from the ESE teacher so that it makes it a little bit easier for her to pull them.

**Leadership and resources.** GETA1 feels that she is respected and trusted by her school principal.

We are given a lot of flexibility in the classroom. Our teacher judgement is appreciated. We are not dictated as far as how to deal with children. We are allowed to evaluate them as individuals because you cannot just clump them all together and say, well, this is an inclusion student...And we are given the flexibility to work with them the way that we see fit.

GETA1 reported that her school principal is very helpful if additional resources are needed.
She is very supportive with helping us find resources.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETA1 described her accommodations and differentiation of instruction to meet the academic and social needs of her students,

Yes, getting involved with the hands-on and the things that are at their level…They, I have to, you know, match them up with higher achieving students. My lowest performing students …We work them into as many social aspects as possible. Helping with supplies when we are getting set up. They are able to contribute to the group so they feel like they are part of the group.

**Summary**

GETA1 believes that an inclusion classroom should have two teachers for the entire school day. She also believes that the inclusion setting benefits all students academically and socially. GETA1 perceives that that celebrating the success of students with learning disabilities fosters their self-esteem. She reported that human resource practices at her school have been supportive. She listed her school principal’s open-door policy and the training she offers to her teachers, the support of her peer teachers, the feeling of belonging to a family, and the high morale at her school as ingredients that makes her successful as an inclusion teacher. GETA1 described the structural practices at her school such as the scheduling procedures and the distribution of students among different classrooms to be supportive. In terms of leadership and resources, GETA1 shared that she feels trusted and respected by her school principal, for she has been flexible with her as how to meet the needs of all students. She reported that her school principal was supportive in providing needed materials. GETA1 mentioned that her strategies in
accommodating her students with learning disabilities by attending to their individual academic and emotional needs using a variety of regrouping techniques.

Case 3- General Education Teacher A2 (GETA2)

The second general education teacher I interviewed from School A (GETA2) is a white male teacher. He has been an inclusion teacher for 10 years. He is currently teaching 4th grade math and science. GETA2 earned a Bachelor’s in Education.

Values and beliefs. GETA2 reported that the inclusion program works at its best when the school has a sufficient number of special education teachers.

You need to have enough VE teachers for a school to be able to cover all the classrooms and be in the classroom long enough to give the students the accommodations they need to be successful.

GETA2 believes that the inclusion program provides the opportunity to students with learning disabilities to have exposure to a role model and to receive the support they need to meet the challenge of the academic standards.

The positive part is that the students are able to make great gains in learning. Being in the classroom, being exposed to students that might be performing a little bit higher academically so they kind of, they get that exposure from the good role models in the classroom. The social skills, the social development. I think inclusion has…helped the students… to their potential a little bit faster, because they have the support in the classroom; plus they have the peer role models in the room to help them.

GETA2 described ways he celebrates success to keep his students motivated.
In the classroom, for trying to keep positive reinforcement, we have incentives and rewards for good behavior, completing classwork, citizenship. So we, we have certain reward systems in place to help kind of promote the students…to keep academically and socially – to keep going.

**Human resource practices.** GETA2 mentioned that he does receive support from his school principal in relation to time for planning and collaboration with his peer teachers.

We get planning time, common planning time that we work with our grade level to look at student work and plan. Many times the inclusion teachers will be in on those planning times. Time is set aside for us to collaborate and look at strategies, what works well, what we could work on.

GETA2 reported that the professional development he receives at his school enables him to meet the academic needs of a variety of students.

We have district training. Professional development that we attend to look at different strategies to help the learners- maybe- kind of way to scaffold the instruction. Looking at the best learning style that fits the student…How to best differentiate the instruction to, to meet, to meet the needs that they, that they need. So we have a lot of training on how to differentiate the instruction so that we’re all learning the same skills and topics, but we might go about doing it in a different way.

**Structural practices.** GETA2 described the strategies he used to collaborate with his peer special education teacher, asserting,

The most effective ways that we use is that we-on the computer we have… basically, you have a portal on the computer that has all of the curriculum and all of the standards so
we, we’re able to access and we have a shared location on the computer that we can share documents. There is a shared drive that we can share documents, so they’re able to see the things that we’re working on...you know communication.

GETA2 explained that he gets support from his school principal and the school district about the students with disabilities’ identification and placement process,

So we have a procedure in place to identify students that are struggling. And what are the next steps to take to try to get them in the best setting.

GETA2 elaborated on the notion that parents are more supportive when they are aware of the rules and procedures involved in the placement of their child in the special education program.

I think just educating the parents and being a good [sic] between the students, the parents and the teachers- to where they can sit down and everybody kind of has input on what’s best for the student-so we have meetings, going through like the RTI process.

**Leadership and resources.** GETA2 shared that his school principal provides him with materials he needs to teach in his classroom, and that she trusts his day-to-day instructional decisions.

When I need additional computers for my students, I go and ask our school principal; textbooks as well. She is always helpful and she does make positive comments when she visit my class, so I know that she trust my decision.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETA2 described many accommodations he used in his classroom to differentiate instruction so that all students are able to function at the expected standard.
Some strategies that I use, is I give them a peer, a student that they work with that kind of helps them so they have a peer to work with, a partner, when they’re doing work. Many times they will get additional time on assignments or the assignment could be shortened a little bit to where, that they aren’t as overwhelmed on the task…lots of positive reinforcement in the classroom with them to keep their self-esteem up, so that they can see themselves being successful. Some other things that we do.

Summary

GETA2 shared his vision about the inclusion program, stating that this program works at its best when there is a sufficient number of special education teachers available, for such an arrangement would increase time on planning and servicing students with learning disabilities. GETA2 believes that students with learning disabilities benefit from the inclusion setting socially and academically. He explained that he has a reward system in class to celebrate the success of all his students. From a human resource perspective, GETA2 shared that he receives support from his school principal in terms of time allocated for planning and collaboration, as well as professional development. GETA2 recognized that on the structural practices level, he receives support from the school district and school principal in understanding the rules and procedures involved with the identification and the placement process for students with disabilities. At the leadership and resources level, GETA2 reported that at his school he feels trusted by his school principal to make his daily instructional decisions and that he receives all the needed materials he needs for his classroom. To include all students in his instruction, he described strategies he used, such as differentiating instruction and accommodating students who needs additional time and support to function on grade level.
Case 4- General Education Teacher A3 (GETA3)

GETA3 is an African American female. She has been an inclusion teacher for thirteen years. She is currently a 5th grade Math and Science teacher. She has a Bachelor’s in Elementary Education.

Values and beliefs. GETA3 believes that an inclusion program works at its bests when high consideration is given to the placement of students with disabilities ensuring that they are distributed equally among different classrooms. She believes that both the special education teacher and the general education teacher should co-teach in the same classroom for the entire school day.

They make sure that there aren’t any teachers that are completely overwhelmed with behavior problems or completely overwhelmed with, you know, a large group of kids who have the same disability…They were spread out among the different fifth grade ELE teachers so that – there wasn’t, you know, such a large population in one classroom… At its absolute best, I think the inclusion model is a co-teach classroom, where you have a general education teacher and an ESE teacher in the same room, full-time, every day. That never happens, but that is the ideal situation.

GETA3 shared that students with and without learning disabilities benefit from the inclusion setting both socially and academically,

Oh yeah, social skills are great, too [sic] not just that they’re…I think for the regular education kids, it’s good because the ESE kids aren’t singled out, but I think the ESE kids are able to see what constitutes appropriate behavior. It’s really important for them to see what appropriate behavior looks like, and I think that it is a big benefit for the ESE kids.
GETA3 explained that she celebrates her students’ success to bring to their attention that effort does matter.

If somebody does something, you know, good, we talk about it, we cheer, we celebrate, we do all those Kagan technique clap things that the kids think are fun at this age.

GETA3 shared that one way to foster positive attitudes among her peer teachers regarding the inclusion program was to remain positive and to explain to others the benefit of inclusion on all students.

I think our kids are great at that because we have…We’re an autistic site, so we have all different kinds of kids with different needs. And I think our kids are very accepting and helpful to the kids who have those needs. I think it’s just a matter of being positive with the kids, being positive with your colleagues.

**Human resource practices.** GETA3 reported that she is supported by special education teachers who are flexible. She described her relationship with peers.

The ESE teachers are very, very supportive and very flexible in helping the general education teacher with the students. I think that’s a very positive practice that we have here.

GETA3 described the professional development she attended as helpful in terms of dealing with students’ behavior, selecting accommodations, and communicating with parents.

Basically just teaches you how to deal with behavioral issues with all kinds of kids, not just inclusion. That was really helpful. And, I did a summer institute that was given by the district, and it was just all about implementing inclusion in the classroom. So it was multi-part. It dealt with behavior, how to do accommodations, how to deal with parents
of children who have learning disabilities. That was actually, probably, the most helpful thing that I did.

**Structural practices.** GETA3 shared that from a structural perspective, prior to the beginning of the school year, her school principal makes sure that students’ placement is done in a way that does not burden the teacher.

I think, ultimately, [the principal] is the one that decides where the students are going to be placed. And I think that she does that in a very fair way. I think that’s the biggest support that we receive from her [laughs].

GETA3 explained that her principal allows the inclusion teachers to make their own schedule. Scheduling is not something that she really does. The ESE teachers and the general education teachers kind of get together and a schedule is created. You know, we’re in charge of our own schedule.

GETA3 reported that she receives support from the school and the district to understand and to implement rules and procedures pertaining to teaching students with learning disabilities who experience behavior difficulties.

I guess if we need assistance, there is a procedure for contacting the district and having district specialists come in, like behavior specialists can come in and work with you and your students to try to figure out a behavior plan. If it’s needed.

She added,

So the school district does provide additional assistance and procedures to put in place.

GETA3 reported that collaboration with her peer special education teacher was helpful and that she makes sure to keep an open line of communication with her peer teacher.
It’s just keeping lines of communication open. You know, we talk every day, so if I have a student who is struggling and the ESE teacher, you know, she comes in for thirty minutes a day for that student, if she needs to, she’ll increase time with that student… So it’s just a matter of communicating every day, what the student needs, where they’re struggling, if they need extra time, if they need to be taken aside and, you know, worked with in another classroom- or something like that-- Just that day-to-day communication.

**Leadership and resources.** GETA3 mentioned that her school principal provided inclusion teachers the freedom to come up with their own schedule,

> We do our own schedules…Our school principal provides inclusion teachers the freedom to. We create our own schedule.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETA3 explained that her instructional interventions are based on the student’s IEP and on her ability to be flexible.

> It depends on what is in their IEP. Some of the kids need directions clarified, or they need their work given to them in smaller chunks. They can’t sit for an extended period of time to complete an assignment, so I let them work on it for a little bit, take a break, let them work a little bit more, take a break as needed. I also do small-group instruction with them if they’re needing assistance on something, or one-on-one instruction with them if they need assistance. They get extra time, if needed. Sometimes they do need to pulled-out of the classroom because they can’t deal with distractions, so they get tested in another location. I’m just very flexible.
Summary

GETA3 explained that the inclusion program works best when students with learning disabilities are equally divided among inclusion classrooms. She thinks that both special education teachers and general education teachers should work together in the same classroom for the entire school day. She celebrates students’ success to boost their self-esteem. GETA3 described human resource practices at her school to be supportive, for she feels supported by her peer special education teacher and her school principal who provides training opportunities. GETA3 asserted that on a structural level, she is supported because her school principal knows how to place students in inclusion classrooms. She stated that keeping an open line of communication with her peer special education teacher increased their collaboration. She also shared that the school district helps her in understanding rules and procedures regarding special education services. On a leadership level, GETA3 indicated that her school principal delegates to inclusion teachers the power to create their own schedule and procedures. GETA3 explained that she practices inclusive instruction by implementing students’ IEPs and by providing her students flexibility they need in their learning.

Case 5- General Education Teacher A4 (GETA4)

GETA4 is a white female who has been an inclusion teacher for ten years. GETA4 is currently a 3rd grade Language Arts teacher. She earned a Bachelor’s in Education. GETA4 was friendly and positive about being an inclusion teacher.

Values and beliefs GETA4 calls for a full inclusion program and expressed reservations about the pull-out program.
I find that makes a difference because the children are not constantly leaving the classroom and missing a good portion of my lessons. She shared that both general and special education teachers should work in the inclusion classroom for the entire school day to make the inclusion program work at its best. I think, in my ideal setting, that ESE teacher should be in the general education classroom full time. Not part time.

GETA4 explained that the inclusion setting fosters positive social interaction between students with and without disabilities, and it enables students to work toward the standards and meet high expectations. I think in an inclusion setting, some of the benefits would be, social skills are definitely a benefit for many of the children. The children are exposed to the regular curriculum, you know that curriculum that is expected of them, that they'll be tested on, for the state testing. I think that it gives them an opportunity to at least attempt to try to reach those higher-level goals.

**Human resource practices.** GETA4 reported that human resource practices at her school have been supportive, for she feels supported by her peer special education teacher. The ESE teacher and the general education teacher work very closely together. She [special education teacher] spends a lot of time in my classroom, and so I'm able to plan with her, work with her, and really focus on the children versus her constantly pulling children out.

GETA4 shared that she also receives support from her school principal, who she finds to be understanding and flexible.
I would say she has a good understanding of the fact that my children, many times, have different needs, so she allows me to be a little more flexible in my lesson planning, and if I happen to be a little more behind the other teachers, she is more accepting of that.

GETA4 expressed her satisfaction with some professional development programs.

I've gone to a lot of professional training through...They have been extremely helpful; they've offered a lot of strategies that have taught me how to break down my lessons and manage my children's behavior… Sometimes children who come in with learning disabilities, they struggle with, you know, with their behavior because they feel frustrated. So, sometimes, you know, the learning and the behavior go hand in hand, and so the strategies that I have learned have definitely helped me, such as learning what behaviors to focus on, what behaviors to ignore, and how to break down their academics into smaller… I guess into smaller sections.

**Structural practices.** GETA4 described her enthusiasm about being an inclusion teacher.

She explained that she opted to teach in an inclusion setting.

I personally, I enjoy the inclusion kids, my partner and I asked for it, and I come right out and tell them, you know, my grade level knows that we enjoy it and we're always smiling about it.

GETA4 reported her familiarity with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and her ability to understand the accommodations prescribed in this document.

I can read the questions to them. I am not the type of teacher who will give them thirty questions. I understand that a lot of these children are going to get overwhelmed with
that, so sometimes less is more. You know, if they can answer five questions versus the fifteen or thirty questions, you know, so sometimes lessening the amount of questions that they have, and like I said: modeling. These kids need so much modeling [smiles].

**Leadership and resources.** GETA4 shared that she and her peer special education teacher spends time to locate materials that fit the needs of their students.

Well, we definitely spend a lot of time sitting down, planning together. We look for resources that are going to help our children's supplements... So the ESE teacher and I will spend a lot of time looking for supplemental materials.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETA4 described her instructional interventions to be centered on the student’s individual needs. She uses manipulatives to teach reading and she applies the gradual release approach in her teaching.

I take a look at the child's individual needs a lot more [unclear]. I use a lot more strategies in my classroom. I teach reading, so I have a lot more things in my classroom, such as whisper phones, and I have like guiding rulers in my class, so they can track their reading, as you know, as I have the trackers. So I have a lot more manipulatives in my classroom, and I have, I do a lot more read-aloud with the kids. I do a lot more modeling with the children, than I would, you know, in a basic general education classroom. I follow the gradual release model--you know, the 'I do, we do, you do', and I feel that that has benefitted my students.
Summary

GETA4 asserted that an inclusion program would work at its best if there were two teachers in the same classroom for the entire school day. She also recognizes that the inclusion setting benefits students with disabilities socially and academically. She shared that human resource practices at her school have been supportive. She described that she feels supported by her peer teachers and by her school principal who, she said, provides training opportunities. On a structural level, GATA3 reported that she was trained on how to read and implement a student’s Individual Educational Plan (IEP). GETA4 described her collaboration with her peer teachers as productive. On a leadership level, GETA3 expressed her appreciation toward her school principal whom she describes to be “flexible and understanding”. GETA3 stated with reservation that she and her peer teachers spend a lot of time finding materials they need for their students. GETA3 described her inclusive instructional practices to be centered on each individual student’s needs as prescribed in his/her IEP and on modeling and manipulatives.

Case 6- General Education Teacher A5 (GETA5)

GETA5 is a white female teacher who has been involved in the implementation of inclusion at her school for six years. GETA5 is a 3rd grade Math and Science teacher. She earned her Bachelor’ degree in Pre-K Primary Education. GETA5 was brief on her answers and conscious about time.

Values and beliefs. GETA5 believes that both general education teacher and special education teacher should co-teach in an inclusion classroom.
Well, ideally I think it-inclusion- will work best if the ESE teacher and the general education teacher could co-teach.

GETA5 believes that the inclusion setting benefits students with learning disabilities by providing them the opportunity to build friendship and social skills.

I think there's a great camaraderie among the other students. I think that they embrace all of the, you know, ESE kids, and they don’t necessarily know that they're ESE, but they might know that they're a little bit lower and they need help. And I have very friendly students and they're very helpful. So socially, I think it works so well because the other kids embrace them any time they need help [laughs].

GETA5 explained that she celebrates the success of her students.

We usually do, you mean like in the class. Oh yeah, we do parties and they get treats and treasure box and lunch bunch, and things like that [laughs].

**Human resource practices.** GETA5 reported that relationships at her school have been positive with her peer teachers and her school principal.

We have excellent support from our ESE teachers. That's definitely one of the positive things. Also, we just work very well as a team together.

She described the professional support she receives from her school principal as being very good in providing training opportunities.

Our principal's very good about letting us go to trainings, you know, to enhance our education, enhance our teaching strategies and, you know, anytime I find an interesting workshop, you know, I ask for permission and, you know, and she usually gives me permission to go to it. So I usually get [unclear], you know, additional ideas.
GETA5 mentioned one particular training she believed has prepared her to foster a positive communication with her students.

Professional strategies. I went to one, not too long ago, called “Positively Motivating Others”, and it kind of just shared ways to give children positive reinforcement and to not focus on the negative, you know, focus on the positive. And just building relationships with children- and, you know, getting to know them and having them feel comfortable with you [laughs].

Structural practices. On a structural practices level, GETA5 described her collaboration with her peer special education teacher to be based on regular communication regarding their students.

We just communicate regularly about our students and our student's strengths and weaknesses, and we always sit in on IEP meetings with the parents and the ESE teachers.

GETA5 expressed reservations about the scheduling with her peer special education teacher.

Sometimes, the ESE teachers come--you know, when I am doing centers- but sometimes she is in class during my last minute. But it is hard with the scheduling, so she is not here at the same time every day.

Leadership and resources. GETA5 shared that she would rather move to the next question when I asked her about resources. She asked, “What is the next question?”

Inclusive instructional practices. GETA5 asserted that she uses small group instruction to build trust with students who have learning disabilities and also helps students to build friendship with each other.
Small group setting is very important—yes, very important—and, you know, building the relationship with each child, especially with ESE kids and getting so they can trust me and feel comfortable…As I was saying before, the students who are the general education students often do peer tutoring. So you know, pair one of the ESE kids up with a higher level student and then a lot of manipulatives, a lot of repetition.

**Summary**

GETA5 asserted that the inclusion program works at its best when both general education and special education teachers co-teach in the same class. She reported that the inclusion setting provides students with disabilities the opportunities to build friendship and social skills. GETA5 celebrates the success of her students to improve their self-esteem. On the human resource practices level, GETA5 mentioned that she enjoys the support of her peer special education teacher with whom she maintains regular communication about students. She also expressed her satisfaction with the support she gets from her school principal when she asks to attend professional development programs she thinks would improve her teaching skills. GETA5 did not elaborate on structural and leadership practices at her school. She described her instructional strategies as helpful in terms of building a trusting relationship with her students.

**Case7 – Special Education Teacher A1 (SETA1)**

The first special education teacher I interviewed from school A (SETA1) is a white female. SETA1 has been a special education teacher for twenty years. She currently services students with disabilities in 4th and 5th grades. She earned her Bachelor’s in Science of Education. SETA1 was broad in her answers and was often willing to talk about some obstacles pertaining to the implementation of inclusion, which was not the in the scope of this study.
**Values and beliefs.** SETA1 explained that the inclusion program benefits students with and without learning disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally.

I think the inclusion is a good idea. I think it helps the kids socially, on all levels. Even the lowest kids benefit socially being around the general education kids, and I think being around the needy kids helps the regular education kids to be more compassionate and to be more understanding, and when they get to middle school and high school, hopefully they're not going to be one of the ones that makes fun of these kids that are there, too. They'll be more understanding and try to be an advocate for them.

**Human resource practices.** SETA1 expressed her satisfaction about the human resource practices at her school. She explained that she feels supported by her peer teachers.

Ok, the teachers are very helpful, and just having supportive teachers makes implementing inclusion much easier, in the classroom or outside of the classroom.

SETA1 indicated her satisfaction with her school principal, whom she perceives to be very supportive, for she knows about special education.

Our principal is great. She was an ESE teacher, and so she has some sympathy for some of the things that might be going on and understanding- a good understanding of what's going on- and that in itself is very supportive [unclear], but she's always willing to listen if there's any issue that we have. She is always willing to work with it.

SETA1 claimed that the most effective professional development she had was the product of her having hands-on learning.
Hands-on learning in the classroom is how you learn, and the education is important. I understand that, but as far as one specific thing that has helped me above all others, I can't think of what that might be.

**Structural practices.** SETA1 expressed her satisfaction with the structural practices at her school. She shared that teachers with positive attitudes toward the inclusion program make her job more productive and enjoyable.

In this particular school, I don't think there's a teacher I've ever worked with here that I've felt did not want to be there, and didn’t have the child's best interest at heart. They are very, very productive, everyone I've ever worked with. They are very caring about the students’ condition in this school…Yes, the positive attitude, and the willingness to work in an inclusion setting seems to be a very good practice at our school [laughs].

She added,

…Well, it helps very much to have a teacher who's happy to be the inclusion teacher. It's not something that is just imposed on someone-- and they are--they have a negative attitude about it from the beginning. It helps me, it helps the child. I mean, it's just…kids can tell.

SETA1 described her collaboration procedure with her peer general education teachers to be based on maintaining regular communication with them either by e-mails or face-to-face meetings.

So lately, the most effective way has been to e-mail them, you know, and then they e-mail back and say, you know, yeah, this needs to be done, or whatever. Or if we could get together on a regular basis, we do get together. But if we could get together on a regular
basis, a set time, worked into a schedule that. We can just sit down in a small group, one to three teachers-- depends on how many are in that group-- and talk about what they feel the best needs are of the student. And then I can ask them how, what I feel are their needs, and then if we disagree, we have to come to some sort of compromise on how we're going to work that out, so...

**Leadership and resources.** SETA1 mentioned that her school principal trusts her to make her own schedule.

In terms of the schedules, she's very accommodating. The teachers who are really willing to work like you say in inclusion, are assigned to the classrooms. That's very supportive of her. Yes, they're supportive of her, too…. But as far as I know, they have positive feelings about our principal; she's a wonderful lady [laughs].

SETA1 explained that her school principal knows how to manage conflicts between teachers.

She certainly has to be an advocate for our department and also the general education department, so she's very good at working and seeing both sides of everything and bringing us together if there's any division—which, for me, so far- there has not been so...

**Inclusive instructional practices.** SETA1 described strategies that helps her to include all students in her class by first making them feel and believe that she genuinely cares for them and by increasing their motivation for learning.

Let them know that you care about them. Let them know that it's going to be important; you're going to have to learn to do certain things. But it's going to be fun too, because we're going to be working together. It's going to be in a smaller group; it's going to be with some other kids that have issues like they do--accommodations that they would use
if they were pulled. It would be in a small group; it wouldn't be more than probably 2-7 kids, at the most. To read, like, math if they have that on their IEP and use a lot of repetition.

**Summary**

The first special education I interviewed from School A (SETA1) explained that the inclusion program benefits all students academically, socially, and emotionally. She reported that human resource practices at her school have been supportive. She explained that she feels supported by her peer teachers and school principal. She stated that hands-on and education were productive sources of learning. SETA1 expressed her satisfaction with the structural practices at her school. She described that inclusion teachers are not selected by the school principal to teach in an inclusion setting. This practice makes it, she said, easy for her because her peer teachers voluntarily chose to be inclusion teachers. SETA1 explained that she e-mails and meets with her peer general education teachers on a regular basis-- which keeps her updated about the specific needs of her students. Although she had reservations about the availability of time to collaborate with her peer teachers, she expressed her appreciation for her school principal, who accommodates her in terms of scheduling. On a leadership level, SETA1 indicated that her school principal’s background in special education made it easier for her to do her job efficiently. SETA1 explained that her inclusive instructional practices begin with communicating to her students her genuine care for them, which increases their motivation to learn. She listed some accommodations she uses with her students such as small groups instruction, assistance with reading math questions and directions, and using a lot of repetition.
Case 8—Special Education A2 (SETA2)

The second special education teacher I interviewed from School A (SETA2) is a white female who has been a general education teacher for five years and a special education teacher for the last three school years. SETA2 holds a Master’s in reading and special education. She is currently teaching in inclusion setting from K-third grade.

**Values and beliefs.** SETA2 asserted that although the inclusion program is a good idea, she feels more comfortable pulling students.

For me it's beneficial in a sense to pull them out because I can be very specific with them. When I'm pulling the data and when I'm highlighting the different areas where there's a common need, I can pull resources and things when they're in my room. We kind of address those deficits and those holes.

**Human resource practices.** SETA2 explained that human resource practices at her school have been supportive on both the professional and personal levels. She asserted that the trainings she received from the district on reading, writing, and implementing students’ Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were productive.

Definitely… I think that the only real ESE training…Just how to navigate the IEPs.

**Structural practices.** SETA2 explained that although there is an issue with scheduling, she manages to coordinate with her peer teachers many ways to group her students based on data. She indicated that she was creative in meeting the needs of her students.
…I realized I don't have time in the day for all of the groups I needed to meet with. So I decided to kind of combine grade levels…You're working around. We sit down to try to figure out how to do it based on need and data. The groups would then be fluid.

**Leadership and resources.** SETA2 shared that she feels being supported by her school principal. She also mentioned that she has the materials she needs in her classroom. So just her being as flexible as she is…Allowing us to take the lead and her not giving us the schedule…When she hired me, the biggest thing is that she's not a micromanager. So she gives me the ability to make my own schedule as long as I'm seeing my kids and making that work... She allows me to do what I think is best for my kids. Really the biggest thing is just flexibility. I was experienced, so she trusted that I kind of knew what I was doing… Having resources available.

**Inclusive instructional practices** SETA2 described how she includes all her students in her instructional setting.

So for reading I have two groups and two individual cases. I do push-in, but just [unclear] I found, space for a higher ESE group and a lower ESE reading group… You know, I'm able to really get to what the root of the problem is; I'm able to clarify; and I'm able to support and break things down even further.

**Summary**

The second special education teacher from School A (SETA2) I interviewed shared that she sees benefits relative to the pull-out model. She reported that human resource practices at her school have been supportive. SETA2 described easy access to her school principal as helpful. She stated that her training on IEPs was productive. SETA2 indicated that structural practices
have also been supportive. She explained that her peers allow her to regroup students to meet their needs based on data and to provide pull-out services as needed. On a leadership and resource level, SETA2 explained that her school principal was not a micro-managing leader. She also indicated that she has the resources she needs. SETA2 described her inclusive instructional practices to be data driven. She reported that she uses a small group setting and she breaks skills and concepts to small sections to ensure that her students were able to grasp the concepts she was teaching.

**Case 9- School Principal B1 (SPLB1)**

The school principal I interviewed from School B (SPLB1) is a white female. SPLB1 was involved in the implementation of inclusion for twenty years. She earned her Master’s in Education Leadership.

**Values and beliefs.** SPLB1 shared her vision about the inclusion program describing it as the appropriate program for students with learning disabilities.

We work very diligently to make sure that students have every opportunity to learn in an inclusive environment that is free and appropriate public education for them [unclear] and is up to the same standard as every other child has and deserves.

SPLB1 explained that the inclusion model provides students with disabilities the opportunity to interact with different students, to learn to collaborate with them peer students, and to feel as part of the group.

When we used to have self-contained classes, there were no models for some of our exceptional education students to see. In the inclusion setting, we have sometimes average to higher average students as models for students…Also they learn from
collaboratively small group settings. That enables them to achieve at higher levels... It helps them feel as if they are more involved in the group setting.

SPLB1 explained that she constantly reminds her teachers that every child should have access to the opportunity to learn to his/her maximum potential.

We strive every day. We ask teachers to remember and think and keep in the forefront of their mind that every child at [school name] is a special child. Every child needs to have an opportunity to have the best education possible. Every child is a member of our family… So we remain positive with them. We reiterate these beliefs in faculty meetings with our teachers…Absolutely, every student in our school has the same access to every program in our school. There is no drawing of lines or differentiation in access.

SPLB1 explained how she and her teachers celebrate the success of their students.

Teachers are very good about recognizing when they've made growth and made gains. They will notify the administration and the general education classroom teachers for celebrations. Students come to the office to be recognized. We go to the classroom to recognize them.

**Human resource practices.** SPLB1 indicated that she supports her teachers by providing them on-site training opportunities.

We try to include our teachers when we have workshops for math, for reading, and for our blended learning technology-based platforms. We try to include all of our teachers in those sessions so they all receive the same information and can take that information back to their children…The on-site training strategies that we've had at school have been most
helpful for us. We prefer to have on-site training because we can focus more on what we can do for our students versus large group training at the district.

SPLB1 mentioned that she supports her teachers when she identifies data that indicate growth they have made with students.

We are constantly looking at data…When we see gains and growth, we celebrate that.

We support them and celebrate them just as we would all of our children.

**Structural practices.** SPLB1 described her structural practices to be supportive to her teachers.

We encourage them to have common planning together. We try to encourage them to meet with the general education teachers to do planning. We have common planning at our school on particular days with the administration so we have administrative directed common planning…We also offer temporary duties for teachers to write IEPs, to meet with families, and to have IEP meetings. So we really try to open the door for all of our teachers to be able to serve the students in the best way possible. We try to be very collaborative with our teachers so that we can help serve kids in the best way.

SPLB1 described her approach to meeting the needs of students in an inclusion setting to be based on flexibility. She reported that she sees the pull-out as a safety net to accommodate students who needs additional assistance.

Also, strategies that have worked for us are to do some pull-out when necessary, to work with students who need extra support.

SPLB1 mentioned that she encourages her teachers to use support facilitation as an effective collaboration practice.
The ones that we have found to be most successful are the collaborative practices with the classroom teachers. Support facilitation has been extremely helpful within our school setting… So these have probably been the most supportive practices.

SPLB1 shared that she tries to keep the number of students with disabilities in inclusion classroom manageable.

We keep track of our numbers very steadily…When we have placement meetings, we do try to make sure our numbers are not getting too high. We try to work diligently with the district to support us and make sure we can keep our numbers, as much as possible, under twenty.

**Leadership and resources.** SPLB1 expressed her appreciation to the school district’s effort to educate parents about the rules and procedures associated with the students’ Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

I think that the district is educating parents to the point of when they have initial IEP meetings and when they have initial staffing meetings…When we have students transferred, their parents are more familiar with inclusive practices. They're more familiar with support facilitation, and it makes it easier for us to pick up our program for any new students and continue on with it.

In terms of resources, SPLB1 shared that the district has been responsive and supportive when there is a need of specialized training.

We have interventionists from our school district who are available to assist us in various areas, especially, related to behavioral strategies-- and strategies in general-- for assisting exceptional education students. So we do have district personnel who are available to
support us... We try to advocate for as many positions as we can here at the school. We try to make sure that we are supportive for the numbers of children that we have. We are in constant contact with the district when we feel like we are not being supported from the district level for the numbers of children that we have... We've also been able to order separate materials for several years for our ESE students.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** SPLB1 described many ways she involves students on a variety of learning and development opportunities at the school level. We include children at every level of leadership at our school. If we have patrols, if we have Teachers of Tomorrow, and if we have our students on our morning television show. We try to include our students in those programs for the benefit of the school and the children. Every child should have access to every program that we offer within the school. We try to work with their families. We bring the families on board and make sure they feel welcome... We try to keep positive attitudes.

**Summary**

School Principal B1 (SPLB1) asserted that the inclusion program benefits students with disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. She reported that the inclusion model provides students with learning disabilities the opportunities to interact with peers, to learn to collaborate with different students, and to feel part of the group. On the human resource practices level, SPLB1 described the on-site training she provides to her teachers to be productive. She shared many ways she uses to celebrate her teachers’ success. On a structural level, SPLB1 reported that she offers her teachers the time they need to plan and to collaborate; the flexibility to use the pull-out model when necessary; and the time to write their students’ IEPs. She also
shared that she focuses on maintaining a manageable number of students in each inclusion classroom. On a leadership and resources level, SPLB1 described herself as students’ and teachers’ advocate. She shared that at her request, the district provides specialized interventionists and materials she needs to ensure that her students, particularly students with disabilities, have a fair access to learning. SPLB1 reported that she includes students with learning disabilities in all the school’s activities.

**Case 10- General Education Teacher B1 (GETB1)**

The first general education teacher I interviewed from School B (GETB1) was a white female. GETB1 was a third grade inclusion teacher who has been a general education teacher for six years and a special education teacher for the last four years. She teaches 3rd grade math and science. She earned a Bachelor’s in Science.

**Values and beliefs.** GETB1 reported that she believes in the inclusion program. She also indicated that a pull-out system should remain in place as a safety net for students who are experiencing severe difficulties in closing the academic gap with their peer students.

I believe in full inclusion, but there are some children who are three to four years below grade level. Including them in a classroom with children who are three to four levels above them is fine in some ways because you get the expectation aside and you give them exposure. But, I really believe that for reading and math, they should be pulled out. As a general education teacher, when you have kids ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade in one class, it’s very difficult to manage it. Their self-esteem pays for it. I’d like to see them more successful, and I think they could if they are pulled out.

GETB1 expressed that she has high expectations from students with disabilities.
I think we keep our expectations high because they are very capable of learning like everyone else.

GETB1 explained that students with and without disabilities benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from an inclusion setting.

Everybody says low kids learn from high kids, but high kids learn from low kids too. That’s a big misconception. Some people think we should teach down to kids, but it shouldn’t be. You should keep your expectations high. They can do a lot more than you can imagine with the right encouragement and positive feedback. Some of the most difficult concepts the ESE kids will get and the other kids won’t. That’s fascinating to me. That’s why I love it… I love when I can see a child who hates math because they are so far below level, and I see their confidence grow the whole year… We celebrate every little thing, whether it be adding two digits one day to adding three digits. We celebrate everything and it really boosts their self-esteem and helps them blossom into the young person they’re going to be.

GETB1 shared her accomplishments with students with learning disabilities.

The biggest thing that speaks for the kids is to show their growth. They really show a lot of growth. It is incredible to sit down with somebody and show them how far they’ve caught up. People come to me all the time to ask.

**Human resource practices.** GETB1 reported that human resource practices at her school have been supportive. She indicated that her school principal provides her the opportunities to participate in professional development programs and time to plan.
She is always quick to let me do any professional development or anything I want to do, which helps with the inclusion kids. She gives me additional planning time if I need it. GETB1 expressed her satisfaction with the quality of the training she gets from her school.

The big thing is differentiating... Lots of people have a misconception of grade recovery, and I don’t believe in grade recovery. I’d rather teach them until they know it and give them a [unclear]. If we have to reteach, we’ll reteach. But, grades have to be true to what they can do based on their standards and what they need to able to do.

**Structural practices.** GETB1 explained that structural practices at her school were supportive.

We have common planning time which is always beneficial…But that’s always a good thing. We do a lot of collaborating outside of work time, before school, or after school. I talk a lot with my partner. We know the 5th grade teachers who always get my kids, so we’ve learned to vertically talk and always talk back and forth. We’ll look at the curriculum itself since we’re teaching a new curriculum this year, so we have to hash that out a bit.

GETB1 stated that she appreciates the support she gets from the school district and from her school counselors in terms of training.

In a lot of ways, training on Response to Intervention can be good because we learn to be quick to identify children.

**Leadership and resources.** GETB1 mentioned that her school principal trusts her judgments and provides her the autonomy to teach her students as she sees best fit.
She gives me the luxury to do what I need to do with my kids… She [principal] knows I’ll get them there. She’s very good about that… The district does a really good job of providing us with materials.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETB1 explained that practices such as identifying students who are having academic difficulties at an early stage and differentiating instruction have helped her in including these students in her instruction.

I think we are very quick to identify our students and finding children who are having difficult times. We do a good job with differentiating and communicating what we need to do to get them where they need to be. GETB1 described the instructional strategies she uses to increase participation of her students.

I’m a big advocate for movement. I constantly get my kids up and moving and exercising and doing a lot of cross-brain activities. I have found so many of them have attention difficulties, whether it be that they have attention difficulties or things are just too difficult. I have implemented learning with movement and different activities like a noodle and things that are on-line that we can do to dance and do self-calming… Hands-on activities, for sure. Lots of repetition, movement, things like that are very important, and my kids usually do really well. I love to integrate technology, as well. I’m fortunate enough to where I have a Smart Board so my kids can go to the Smart Board to figure things out. It’s so tangible that it really benefits them.

**Summary**

The first general education teacher I interviewed from School B (GETB1) explained that the inclusion program offers all students the opportunities to grow academically, socially, and
emotionally. GETB1 reported that he holds all students to the high expectations. She expressed her satisfaction with the human resource practices at her school. She shared that her school principal provides on-site training to teachers and needed time to plan and to collaborate. On a structural level, GETB1 described that the school district and the school counselors were very supportive with the RtI, which speeds up the placement of students into the appropriate setting. On a leadership level, GETB1 mentioned that she feels supported by her school principal who trusts her instructional decisions. In terms of resources, GETB1 indicated that the school district provides the materials she needs in her class. GETB1 described a variety of inclusive instructional practices she uses to foster students with disabilities’ participation in learning.

Case 11- General Education Teacher B2 (GETB2)

The second general education teacher I interviewed from School B (GETB2) was a white male. GETB2 has been an inclusion teacher for 16 years. He earned a Master’s in special education and a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education. He is currently teaching 4th grade math and science.

Values and beliefs. GETB2 described that the inclusion program works at its best when one special education teacher is assigned to only one or two classrooms so that students receive the support they need.

…See, we are a larger school. So I always thought that it'd be nice to have a smaller ratio—that'd be nice. So, ideally, it would be nice to see one inclusion classroom with one ESE support teacher, I guess, or two. So they're always getting reading and math. They are always double teaming. So more time with the students would be ideal.

GETB2 indicated that the inclusion program offers many benefits to students.
They can get quality instruction. They feel like they are part of the group instead of always pulled out in self-contained in some corner hallway…They are part of the group. So I think that huge. If you add their self-esteem as well, everything else follows. If you can raise students’ self-esteem, they'll do whatever you want them to do and they'll want to learn. They'll want to please not just themselves but the teacher. That's huge [laughs].

**Human resource practices.** GETB2 reported that human resource practices at his school have been supportive. He explained that the school principal, as well as her assistant, encourage creative ideas in his school.

So the school principal supports your creative ideas. Once [unclear] I had an observation with one of the assistant principals in the past and she liked the basketball hoop so much. Before she left, she gave some kids shots. So they're fully on board with it, but yeah [laughs].

GETB2 reported that the professional development programs he attended were productive.

It was a company that came out of [name] I think that came and watched you teach lessons, you know, once a month and they would stop you on the spot if you were doing something wrong with direct instruction. At first you are uncertain, but then you realize it's there to help you…It allowed me to fully understand the program and make gains…So I think that's big. I know the autism specialists…They give lots of resources, information, and modeling [unclear] that helps you in the classroom.

**Structural practices.** GETB2 indicated that structural practices at his school have also been supportive. He explained that inclusion teachers are not selected by the administration, but they chose to teach in such a setting.
I think sometimes it is-- but I choose to-- I think that I know that I want to. I want that. I want to do that. So they set you up to allow you to do that so to succeed.

GETB2 shared that when he does not understand the procedures involved with new programs, he receives help from the school district.

There's county support too. When I was first teaching, I didn't understand something, or a new program was coming out, or we did direct instruction…I didn't understand. They would come in and tutor you, show you, and model for you so you had a full clear understanding.

GETB2 asserted that understanding what inclusion is and ways students are being staffed into the inclusion program helps teachers to be successful.

The first thing is probably in understanding what inclusion is, how students qualify to receive services, and the whole staff kind of understand IEPs. This puts all of us in a position of success.

GETB2 shared that he collaborates with his peer teachers by maintaining an open line of communication.

I know that my peer teachers appreciate my help in reading and understanding IEPs…I use data to share with them where the student is and where we want him/her to go.

Teachers met before school and after school every other day.

**Leadership and resources.** GETB2 described his working conditions to be based on trust and not on micromanaging.

We are not micromanaged. There is a trust factor that you are going to do what you need to do…If you need support, talk to us. This is at the county level too.
GETB2 reported that his school principal allows him the freedom to make his own teaching decisions.

There is the flexibility that school principal provides you. For instance, I have a basketball hoop in my room, one of the six foot ones we use it as a reward. So if the students answer a hard question, or do something nice, they get a shot at the basketball hoop. So the students with ADHD are able to get up and move around more. Students who need that positive reinforcement or even to feel something, instead of just “Hey, good job”, they can feel it. They get to go up in front of everyone and they get to take the shot. They get that feeling of accomplishment…So we are allowed that freedom and that's important.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETB2 described a variety of accommodations he uses with his students to ensure that they are included in his instruction.

You know, peer tutoring is very big and these kids have, you know, [sic] with disabilities have feelings too. So they might stink at math but they are fantastic writers. So they are tutoring other peers in writing but they need a little extra help in math or vice versa. Maybe they're great at math and problem solving. They can learn their facts really good. So now they are helping kids with flash cards. But, when it comes to writing, they don't know how to put things into paragraphs and they get peer-tutored. Because no one is weak in everything, so you find those strengths. And they're allowed to fit in with their peers…I think that the Response to Intervention…You want to use the RtI model.
Summary

The second general education teacher I interviewed from School B (GETB2) indicated that the inclusion classroom works best when one special education teacher is assigned to teach with one or two general education teachers. He explained that the inclusion program benefits students with learning disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. GETB2 reported that human resource practices at his school were supportive. He reported that he is a successful teacher because his school principal is flexible and trusting. He expressed his satisfaction with the hands-on training. GETB2 shared that structural practices have also been supportive at his school. He explained that he communicates with his peer teachers on a daily basis to ensure ongoing collaboration. He asserted that he understands inclusion, he knows how to read IEPs, and to use new education programs the district provides. On the leadership level, GETB2 stated that when teachers chose to teach in an inclusion setting, students learn best. GETB2 indicated that his school principal allows him the freedom to teach and does not micromanage his teaching. He asserted that his instructional interventions are designed to be inclusive. He explained that the accommodations he uses foster access to learning for all students.

Case 12-Special Education Teacher B1 (SETB1)

The first special education teacher I interviewed from School B (SETB1) was a white female. She taught in an inclusion setting for 15 years. She earned a Bachelor’s degree in Science and Early Child Education.

Values and beliefs. SETB1 shared that she would do a better job if she were assigned to only one classroom. She suggested that the inclusion classroom should have a smaller teacher-student ratio.
From the ESE teacher standpoint, I would just have one grade level….In a school this size, I know there are some inclusion teachers who do more because they’re in smaller classes, and they have fewer students. It is more productive [unclear] a smaller case-load. SETB1 stated that the inclusion program benefits students with and without learning disabilities. There are so many benefits for both the child that has the special needs and the general education student. I see the general education students are learning that we are not all the same, and we are not expected to be the same [laughs]. They learn compassion and to be helpful, and there are so many different things they benefit. So much acceptance.

SETB1 reported that she celebrates the success of her students.

I celebrate with the kids because I can see immediately when they are done how much they have grown. I print it [data] off and hand it to them and carry it back to the general education teacher. We celebrate the growth they have made. It’s so infectious [laughs].

**Human resource practices.** SETB1 described her satisfaction with the human resource practices at her school. She stated that she feels supported by her peer teachers and her school principal.

I can’t say enough positive things about my general education teachers. I have been here for so long…I have good connections with lots of them. They have taken me under their wings and supported me all the way and helped me with anything I needed. We have to work together and we have to communicate together as a team. We work well that way. It’s huge [unclear]…Communication with the teachers, parents, and administration. Just getting everyone on the same page to where we can make sure those needs are met because they are so different [smiles].
SETB1 reported that her school principal has been supportive.

She encourages and supports any professional development. For example, I have a student that is autistic. My level of understanding and knowledge on autism was not as great as I would have liked it to have been. So she made every effort to make sure that I had all the tools I needed and all the training that was available… She makes sure we get the training we need [laughs].

SETB1 expressed her satisfaction with the support she receives from the school district as well.

They provide the professional development. I feel like our ESE admission representative… I feel like I have a relationship with her and I can ask her. There was one day when I said something to her in the spur of the moment about training on dyslexia. I really wanted to be part of the training. I told her I couldn’t find it anywhere. The next day she e-mailed me with information about a free seminar that Susan Barton was going to do here in a month or two… That connection… For them to take the time to find the information for me.

**Structural practices.** SETB1 reported that the availability of here peer teacher with whom she plans and collaborates and plans is among the positive practices that helped her on her teaching.

From my experience, the level of communication between myself and other ESE teachers and the general education teachers is high. We make sure there is a lot of collaboration. Even the speech and language pathologists, the occupational therapist, and physical therapist… The whole team does a lot of collaboration with one another.
SETB1 indicated that being aware of the goals each service provider prescribes for an individual student clarifies her role and keeps her focused on the student’s specific need.

For instance, when the speech therapist is working on the language portion – when we’re writing goals for the student of measuring goals. We check in with each other to see if the goals coincide and work together on it. We do a lot of working back and forth as a big team and working with the general education teachers to make sure they are aware of where we are going with it. So we can support each other to where we can try to meet the child’s needs…Face-to- face talking about each individual student and making sure that we are taking care of what they need specifically. We are in constant contact with each other.

Leadership and resources. SETB1 responded to questions relative to leadership and resources in terms of training she receives from her school principal and the school district.

Inclusive instructional strategies. SETB1 described a variety of instructional strategies she uses with her students to ensure that they are included in her instruction.

I use small group instruction. I use technology and hands-on games. We use white boards where they can actually write the letters and practice writing the letters. I pull out small groups… I use repetition.

Summary

The first special education teacher I interviewed from School B (SETB1), shared that the inclusion program works at its best when one ESE teacher is assigned to one general education classroom. She explained that an inclusion classroom should be designed to ensure a smaller teach-student ratio. SETB1 reported that the inclusion program benefits students with and
without disabilities. She described human resource practices at her school to be supportive. On the structural practices level, SETB1 reported that when rules and procedures are clearly understood, she is able to manage her time with students more efficiently. She stressed the importance of meeting face-to-face with her peer general education teachers to foster collaboration. On the leadership and resources level, SETB1 claimed that the trainings she receives from her school principal and the school district were helpful. SETB1 explained that she uses small group setting, technology, hands-on games, repetition, and pull-out services to facilitate access to learning for all her students.

Case 13-School Principal C1 (SPLC1)

The school principal I interviewed from School C (SPLC1) is an African American female who has been involved in the implementation of the inclusion program for nine years. She earned a Master’s in Educational Leadership. SPLC1 made few correction to the transcript I sent to her to confirm its accuracy.

Values and beliefs. SPLC1 shared that the inclusion program works at its best when the inclusion classroom is designed to be a small class size so that teachers could schedule time to collaborate and to meet the needs of students.

Teachers working together; reviewing student information, data, and IEPs; making sure they are grouped together so that the special education teacher can provide scheduling. Even having small classrooms so the teachers can provide the services to them and there are not too many distractions that a large class can have. Small class size, scheduling is important, and collaboration with the teachers.
SPLC1 reported that both students with and without disabilities benefit from the inclusion setting.

There are benefits. Sometimes the inclusion students can be a role model for the other students because they may take it a bit more seriously. They have to work harder to understand the material. Sometimes their work ethics and study habits might be a little bit better than some of our other students so they can be role models as well…Any kind of progress or growth, we celebrate that.

**Human resource practices.** SPLC1 stated that she attended several trainings offered by the school district and that she receives support from the district.

I would say the district provides training. They provide a district staff person who is attached to our school to provide support and to answer questions.

SPLC1 described her support to the general education and special education teachers.

I make sure they have some time in their day to plan. Just having an open rapport with the teachers so they can communicate with each other.

SPLC1 explained that she pays careful attention to informing teachers that they are supported by her and by the school district.

Making sure. The most thing is making sure they know they have support. So if they have any concern or run against any kind of challenge or barrier, they have the support from us. If there is something we can’t solve from here, we are going to reach out to the district to try to solve whatever issue is taking place…If they [teachers] feel isolated that does not make for a good year.
Structural practices. SPLC1 reported that a small inclusion class size enables teachers to use small group instruction to meet the needs of students.

Small group instruction so they can go in depth with what they are struggling with. More time to complete a particular task. Our ESE students usually need additional time to finish an assignment or have the material explained to them. So a small setting and additional time are needed.

SPLC1 explained that she supports her general and special education teachers by providing them the necessary time to collaborate.

Collaboration between the general education and special education teachers. Make sure they have some time in their day to plan. Just having an open rapport with the teachers so they can communicate with each other.

SPLC1 mentioned that she designs inclusion classrooms to be smaller and that she makes her decisions about placing students with learning disabilities in these classes based on the number of students who are attending her school.

Smaller class size… Before the start of school, we try to look at all the students we have when we are setting up inclusion classrooms so they are not all in one classroom. They are spread out.

Leadership and resources. SPLC1 indicated that she supports her inclusion classroom teachers by providing them the materials they need.

Making sure that both teachers have the resources that they need to support students, especially, if they are a grade level behind. Making sure they have the appropriate materials to help the student to master the content…With any classrooms, we receive
additional dollars to support our ESE students anyway. The VE teachers, the ESE teachers have access to more materials.

**Inclusive instructional strategies.** SPLC1 described that the training she attends on differentiating instruction helped her implement inclusion.

Attending several different district workshops on inclusions or on differentiating instruction, things like that…We are doing whatever we can through small group instruction to make sure they have the resources, the right teachers, and the right settings to have a successful school year.

**Summary**

The school principal I interviewed from School C (SPLC1) reported that the inclusion program works at its best when general education teachers and special education teachers are assigned to a small class size. She shared that the inclusion setting benefits students with and without disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. On a human resource level, SPLC1 indicated that she receives support from the district in terms of training and materials. She stated that she makes sure teachers know they are supported. She encourages her teachers to communicate with her if they have any concerns. On a structural level, SPLC1 explained that she provides her inclusion teachers time they need to plan and to collaborate. She explained that she makes sure to assign students to the inclusion classroom in a balanced manner to ensure quality instruction. On a leadership level, SPLC1 explained that she has an open-door policy with her teachers whom she encourages to share any concern they might have. She reported that she makes sure teachers have all the materials they need. SPLC1 indicated that her training on differentiating instruction increased her awareness about the importance of providing students
with learning disabilities small group instruction and additional time to complete their assignments.

**Case 14- General Education Teacher C1 (GETC1)**

The first general education teacher I interviewed from School C (GETC1) is a white female. GETC1 was involved in the implementation of inclusion for nine years. She is currently a 5th grade Language Arts teacher. She earned a Bachelor’s in Special Education.

**Values and beliefs.** GETC1 indicated that the inclusion program provides students with disabilities the opportunities to achieve their potential. She reported that students with disabilities benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from being in the same classroom than their peer students without disabilities.

For some students it is wonderful because before they would have been in a self-contained classroom and maybe not reaching their full potential due to the disabilities within that classroom. I think they have an opportunity for more. I don’t want to say it’s all about peer modeling, but there is that component in the regular classroom [unclear] and being included in the whole school population…Especially at this school; it helps the other kids with empathy because they are learning. I have had kids with autism and they become very protective of those students. Before, they may have been afraid or not really relating to those students. You have to teach empathy and I do [laughs]. Having these students in the classroom, not pointing them out, but just talking about our differences. It really does help all the kids.

GETC1 explained that celebrating students’ growth leads to further success.
We celebrate success in the classroom with a number of reward systems put into place, and they’re not all academic so that they do have the opportunity to succeed at whatever. Some are academic, but depending on what it is… They would get a Top Quality (TQ) or a Super Top Quality (STQ) and then they get to put stickers on a chart…It promotes the quality of their work and not necessarily just the grades.

**Human resource practices.** GETC1 reported a positive working relationship with the special education teacher and other peer teachers.

I think we have a good ESE support team, and the teachers work well together and they have the interests of the children at heart.

GETC1 also mentioned that she receives support from her school principal in terms of training. She indicated that her degree in special education prepared her more than other professional programs she attended.

Well, I have a special education degree. So that is a start. I was always involved in the Foundations, which is a behavior management system. That is the system for the county, and I think that has helped. When I was an ESE teacher I had lots of trainings…There are trainings available, especially for children with autism because those students are becoming more prevalent in the inclusion classrooms.

**Structural practices.** GETC1 reported that flexibility in scheduling has helped her to succeed.

So I don’t see anything beyond . . . flexibility, maybe, with scheduling and planning.

GETC1 reported that she is aware of the goals and objectives prescribed in each student’s individual education plan (IEP).
Obviously anything that is in their IEP…Focused on special grouping. I differentiate different tasks. That is not just for my inclusion kids but even for my lower students. GETC1 reported that her collaboration with her peer teachers was positive.

We have a very similar philosophy and love for the children, and we are always just trying to see the best ways to reach the child and also both have a relationship...So just letting the children know that we are both there for them [smiles].

**Leadership and resources.** GETC1 shared that the school principal gives her and her peer teacher flexibility with scheduling and planning.

Our school principal gives us flexibility in making our own planning and scheduling time. This flexibility is a major factor. We are not being looked at under a microscope.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** GETC1 asserted that her instructional practices were inclusive.

With a special education background, I already differentiated always. So it wasn’t new to me to differentiate. That is how I always ran my classroom. Just giving the autonomy to the students to lead their own learning, and I was always really big in that with my special education students. I think it enhances the general education students as well…It gives them ownership of their learning…I differentiate all of their tasks based on what they need.

**Summary**

The first general education teacher I interviewed from School C (GETC1) asserted that the inclusion program provides students with and without disabilities the opportunities to learn from each other, and it enables them to perform at their highest potential. GETC1 reported that
celebrating her students’ performance on the quality of work and not only based on grades increases opportunities for success. On the human resource practices level, GETC1 reported that most support comes from her peer teachers. She reported that some trainings on behavior and autism helped her in meeting the students’ specific needs. On a structural level, GETC1 explained that her background in special education was instrumental in guiding her teaching profession. She shared that her understanding of the goals and objectives prescribed on each student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) helps her to successfully meet their needs. On a leadership level, GETC1 indicated that her school principal’s flexibility allowed her to focus on addressing student’s needs. GETC1 explained that she differentiates her instruction in the classroom to increase students’ participation in learning.

**Case 15-General Education Teacher C2 (GETC2)**

The second general education teacher I interviewed from School C (GETC2) was a white female. GETC2 has been a 5th grade math and science inclusion teacher for five years. She earned a Bachelor’s in Early Childhood Education.

**Values and beliefs.** GETC2 asserted that the inclusion program works at its best when two teachers are working together for an entire “block”.

Someone to help with the core subjects, math and reading: they should be there for that whole block… The best way for the inclusion model to work is that you have someone else help you. So I think having an extra body in there that can help facilitate your general education population as well as the inclusion student is the best way.

GETC2 explained that the inclusion program helps to create a “community of learners” where students teach and learn from each other.
A community of learners who all meet the needs of different students as far as making sure your general education population includes these students and helps facilitate these lessons. They can kind of be that extra set of hands to guide those students.

GETC2 described her favorite teaching moment is the time of celebrating her students’ growth. My favorite thing about it is watching those students succeed and watching their general educations classmates who just celebrate that growth with them and building that family community so everyone is learning. It needs to be a family. I tell them they are all my kids. There are 44 of them. But, the best thing is I can send them home [laughs]. We are a family but I don’t have to feed them or bathe them [laughs]….If they’ve done something tremendous I will celebrate them on the blog-- obviously with parent permission. We will celebrate that success. We will do smaller celebrations. We keep charts in our classrooms of growth and various different things. When kids see that so and so scored a high grade, they jump on that [laughs].

**Human resource practices.** GETC2 expressed that she feels supported by her peer teachers with whom she built a family relationship. GETC2 reported that she receives help from the district which sends specialized behaviorists and therapists to her school to help with students with learning disabilities.

We work with each other as a family. The kids are our kids [laughs]…The district provides training and provides us with the necessary resources that we need as far as giving us those extra bodies.

**Structural practices.** GETC2 reported that collaboration with her peer teachers helps her to implement the inclusion program rather well.
I think collaboration with my colleagues is great. We can bounce ideas off each other. Keeping the administration involved is great… And making sure that the needs of their IEPs are being met.

GETC2 described the support she gets in terms of collaboration as positive.

Collaborating with my peers and getting the parents involved and making sure they are, you know, that we are all on the same page as we think is the best plan for children…We usually meet once a week in the mornings to go over our game plans. We share lesson plans and we share ideas throughout the whole process. She is really good at following our blogs so she knows exactly which lessons we are doing. She stays up on that, and she will come in, and she will know exactly what we are doing that week [smiles].

Leadership and resources. GETC2 explained that she receives resources from the school district and that her school principal has always been flexible.

When I need help from a specialized behavior interventionist, the district sends help to our school. I make my own schedule. Our school principal is flexible in allowing us to teach our kids [smiles]!

Inclusive instructional practices. GETC2 mentioned that she uses instructional strategies to include all students.

We have small groups as well as pull-out small groups. But, we also include the general education population into those groups as well. We also do lots of probing as far as guiding them towards the correct answers; primarily with the special education population…We do what is best for all our kids.
Summary

The second general education teacher I interviewed from School C (GETC2) demonstrated a positive attitude toward her students and her peer teachers. She reported that the inclusion program led her to build a “community of learners” where students with and without disabilities help one another. She reported that celebrating students’ success increases their motivation to learn. On a human resource level, GETC2 shared that she feels being part of a family at her school. On a structural level, GETC2 described her collaboration to be supportive. On the leadership and resource level, GETC2 explained that she is supported by specialized teachers and therapists the school district sends to her school. GETC2 described her instructional interventions as inclusive. She stated that she encourages students to work with each other and to own their learning experience.

Case 16-Special Education Teacher C1 (SETC1)

The first special education teacher I interviewed from School C (SETC1) is a white female. She has been involved with the implementation of the inclusion program for four years. She earned a Bachelor’s of Arts in Special Education.

Values and beliefs. SETC1 views the inclusion program as a setting where students with learning disabilities receive the support they need.

…I think they should be supported in the classroom. If they need to be pulled for testing, then that’s great. But, if you’re an ESE teacher you should be almost like co-teaching with the general education teacher. So you are not making them feel different…

SETC1 explained that the inclusion program provides opportunities to students with learning disabilities to learn skills they would not be able to learn in a self-contained setting.
You would see kids with leadership skills…That are higher…You have kids in the
middle and you have low kids too. So when you are in a classroom with mixed-ability
students, they are picking up a lot on the social aspect of it. When they have students they
can compete with academically, it helps motivate them more. They want to do well if
they’re with non-disabled peers.

**Human resource practices.** SETC1 indicated that the support she receives at her school
was positive.

I think the level of flexibility that our teachers have, and I think our school is very ESE-
friendly. We do have a smaller self-contained population. But, our numbers of these
inclusion kids are growing. So the acceptance, I would say, the flexibility to work with
these kids, to accommodate them, and make them feel that they’re not any different than
another student. We do a good job fostering that environment.

SETC1 described her working environment to be supportive.

That’s a plus when you work with these teachers more than a year. You develop a very
close relationship because you are almost in a marriage…You work together and there is-
- you just really want it to work, and you’re always doing what’s best for these children.

SETC1 explained that the support from her school principal involves understanding and
flexibility.

Understanding how rigorous the curriculum is…Being accepting and allowing teachers
to be flexible with the curriculum.

SETC1 reported that the professional development programs that she attended were supportive.
The [district] offers really good trainings and this is my fourth year… Really good positive interventions… Differentiating reading; just how to incorporate different strategies into the classroom.

**Structural practices.** SETC1 shared that the school district is promoting the implementation of a full inclusion program at her school. She explained that this practice makes it easier for her to explain to parents the placement process of their children.

   [District’s name] is really pushing for an inclusion model over the years, I’ve seen them out of self-contained classrooms and they’re really pushing for an inclusion model. They would love 100% inclusion. We do have district people that come out to support the special education teachers, and they will help with strategies and IEP support.

SETC1 explained that she collaborates with her peer teachers outside of school hours.

   Most of the general education teachers have blogs, and I check the blog frequently to make sure that I’m on the same page. Calling, texting over the weekend. But, in here, we try to take five minutes out of a day. We usually try to plan it once a week, especially if something is drastically changing. But, I would say about once a week we try to aim to plan for some time of collaborative planning and outside of school, too.

**Leadership and resources.** SETC1 shared that the administration has been receptive to teachers’ suggestions about time allocated to planning and collaboration.

   I know administration has been working to try to make that happen next year, because we have to be in there to service the students.

SETC1 shared her satisfaction about the materials she receives from the school district.
The students get these module binders now. Instead of textbooks they have these binders of work pages, exit tickets, and things like that will be in there. So they were told that they have to stay in school. It is a workbook for them. Everything in the curriculum revolves around those module books. So for our kiddos, we do give them that flexibility...To take them home to study.

**Inclusive instructional practices.** SETC1 explained that she uses accommodations as a vehicle to help her students to succeed.

Accommodation is not trying to modify or change the curriculum. You’re just trying to do accommodations to help them be successful. Allowing them extended time if they need more time on the test. We are going to give them more time. Shortening assignments and giving them ahead of time. If they can’t finish in class, I give them the opportunity to bring it home.

**Summary**

The first special education I interviewed from School C (SETC1) asserted that inclusion works at its best when both special and general education teachers work together for the entire school day. SETC1 explained that the inclusion program benefits students with learning disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. She reported that celebrating her students’ growth increases their motivation to succeed. On a human resource level, SETC1 reported that she feels being supported by her peers. She shared that the trainings she received were supportive. On a structural level, SETC1 described her collaboration with her peer teachers to be based on maintaining regular communication with her peer teachers through texting, blogs, e-mails, and phone calls.
She indicated that her school district supports her directly by pushing for full inclusion, for she finds it easier to get parents on board. On a leadership and resource level, SETC1 explained that her school principal has been flexible by allowing her to make instructional and scheduling decisions. She reported that such flexibility was supportive and conducive to high learning performance of her students. SETC1 expressed her appreciation for the materials the school district provides to her classroom. She described her inclusive instructional practices to be based on accommodations and differentiation of instruction strategies.

The Cross-Case Analysis

In this study I used a collective case study methodology (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994; Yin 2009). I employed the *Four Frames of Leadership* framework (Bolman and Deal, 2003) and the *Differentiation of Instruction (DI)* framework (Hall, 2002) to bring a structure to the data analysis. In the previous section, I presented a detailed case report for each of the 16 participants. In this section, I present the themes that emerged and were common across all cases. I introduce the findings pertaining to the five research questions that have emerged during data analysis stage.

RQ1: What are the values and beliefs of inclusion teachers and school principals?

RQ2: How do inclusion teachers and school principal support each other to implement the inclusion program?

RQ3: Which structural practices support the inclusion program?

RQ4: How does the school principal supports her/his inclusion teachers?

RQ5: What are the inclusive instructional practices?
I, then, set forth the classroom observations and the document analysis I employed in this study to ensure a triangulation of data sources.

I followed the procedures outlined by Boeije (2002) for the constant comparative method of data analysis. After I completed the open coding and wrote case studies for 16 interviews, I compared findings between interviews using axial coding, which involves putting data back together in new ways by making connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1980) to develop concepts and to discover themes, clusters, or typologies. The cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) was written from the themes that developed during the axial coding process.

Common themes

Five common themes, across all cases, emerged from the cross-case analysis. Some themes included subthemes. Within the construct of symbolic/cultural frame, a major theme emerged:

1. Positive attitudes and beliefs (RQ1), and four subthemes: (a) self-efficacy, (b) learning outcome, (c) expectations, and (d) purpose and celebration.

Within the construct of human resource frame (RQ2), a second theme comes out:

2. Relationships and two subthemes: (a) communication, and (b) professional development.

Based on the construct of structural frame (RQ3), a third theme appeared:

3. Collaboration and three subthemes: (a) planning time, (b) knowledge, and (c) students’ placement. According to the construct of political frame (RQ4), a fourth theme was visible:

4. Distributive leadership and resources.
Within the construct of inclusive schools (RQ5), a fifth theme emerged: 5. Inclusive instruction with four subthemes: (a) differentiation of instruction, (b) accommodations, (c) Response to Intervention, and (d) Technology. As described in Table 4, role-based participation from the three different elementary schools, I interviewed 16 participants: Three school principals, four special education teachers, and nine general education teachers.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools (3)</th>
<th>School Principal</th>
<th>Special Education Teacher</th>
<th>General Education Teacher</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All participants were involved in the implementation of the inclusion program.

**Common theme 1: Positive attitudes and beliefs.** At School A, School B, and School C all school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers demonstrated positive attitudes about the inclusion program. Cochran (1998) argued that a positive attitude of inclusion teachers is the key to success. Based on participants’ interviews, their positive attitude manifested itself in four ways: (a) self-efficacy, (b) learning outcome, (c) expectations, and (d) purpose and celebration.

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura (1977) stated that self-efficacy is the belief or expectation that one can perform the certain behavior required to produce a desired outcome. That is, the author
explained, an individual’s self-efficacy will affect the types of activities he/she will undertake. Special education teachers from the three schools where I conducted this study unanimously reported that their peer general education teachers chose to teach in an inclusion classroom. The special education teacher from School A (SETA1) indicated that her peer teachers’ willingness to teach in an inclusion setting is a supportive practice at her school. She stated,

In this particular school, I do not think there is a teacher I have ever worked with whom I have felt did not want to be there and did not have the child’s best interest at heart [smiles]…Yes, the positive attitude and willingness to work in an inclusion setting seems to be a very good practice at our school.

This comment seemed to reflect not only a sense of self but also the teachers’ dedication to their students and their efforts to work together. The 4th grade general education teacher from School A (GETA4) described her personal decision to teach in an inclusion classroom, stating that, “I personally, I enjoy the inclusion kids. My partner and I asked for it [laughs], and I come right out and tell them, you know, my grade level knows that we enjoy it and we are always smiling about it [laughs]”. Several inclusion teachers commonly reported that this practice fosters success in teaching and learning. The second general education teacher I interviewed from School B (GETB2) asserted that having the option to choose to be an inclusion teacher is a recipe for success. He uttered, “I think sometimes [silence] but I chose to, and I think that is, I know that I want to [smiles] I want that. I want to do that. So they set you up to allow you…to succeed”.

In addition, some inclusion teachers and all three school principals I interviewed expressed a sense of individual responsibility toward students with learning disabilities. Bandura (1997) argued that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs do not operate in isolation from other
psychosocial determinants that affect their motivations and performances. SETC1 stated, “You have to stick up for them…No matter how difficult they can be. You always have to advocate for them because a lot of times no one else will”. The sense of responsibility GETA4, GETB2, GETC1, SPETA1, and SETC1, expressed indicates that high self-efficacy and a strong sense of individual responsibility foster the success of the inclusion program at these schools. Researchers have found self-efficacy to be an internal personal strength that can contribute to thriving (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). As described in the case reports, all participants thrive to successfully meet the needs of students. They share a high sense of individual responsibility toward students and high self-efficacy relative to their teaching job. GETC1 summed up this thriving, asserting, “I think we have a good ESE support team. The teachers work well together, and they have the interest of the children at heart”.

Learning outcome. As described in the literature review (Chapter 2), evidence supports that an inclusion setting provides students with opportunities to grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003). All participants concurred that the inclusion program presents students with social, emotional, and academic benefits. For example, SETC1 stated, “When you are in a classroom with mixed-ability students, they are picking up a lot on the social aspect of it. When they have students they can compete with academically, it helps motivate them”. GETC1 stated, “Especially at this school, it helps other kids with empathy”, and GETA1 asserted, “The socialization and the interaction with general education students is probably--it benefits both sides”. Across all cases, school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers demonstrated positive attitudes about students’ learning outcome in an inclusion classroom setting.
**High expectations.** Forlin et al., (1999) asserted that positive teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion translate to high expectations from students with disabilities. Ten out of 16 participants in this study clearly indicated that they hold all their students, including students with disabilities, to high expectations. SPLB1 stated, “Every student in our school has the same access to every program in our school. There is no drawing of lines”. GETB2 emphasized, “I think we keep our expectations high because they are very capable of learning…You [silence] should keep your expectations high”.

Most participants from these three elementary schools (School A, School B, and School C) indicated that they believe that all students are able to learn despite their cognitive or physical abilities/disabilities. This position has been advocated by many scholars who reject the determinism views which dominated the educational landscape of the 20th century (Hart et al., 2007; Hehir & Katzman, 2012; Skrtic, 2011). Across all cases, most teachers and school leaders reported that they do focus on teaching their students, regardless of their disabilities/disabilities. This position was clearly described by the SPLB1, who stated, “We work very diligently to make sure that students have every opportunity to learn in an inclusion environment… that is up to the same standard as every other child has and deserves”.

**Purpose and celebration.** The three school principals, as well as all 13 inclusion teachers I interviewed expressed their common beliefs that all students deserve to have full access to quality education. All school principals reported that one of their priorities is to remind their teachers, at every occasion, about the purpose of their mission and to encourage them to celebrate the success of their students. Hehir and Katzman (2012) explained that leaders should translate these values into action. Eleven out of 13 participants shared that they do celebrate
students’ successes. For example, SPLA1 shared, “We include our students with learning
disabilities in our celebrations”, while SPLC1 explained, “For all students, any kind of progress
or growth, we celebrate that”, and GETB1 indicated, “We celebrate everything. It really boosts
their self-esteem”.

The statements above demonstrate that the culture of inclusion is deeply internalized
among school leaders and inclusion teachers at these schools. Participants demonstrated a sense
of purpose and pride in their work. They celebrate their students’ success, and they strive to
include every child in the learning process. SPLB1 described this frame of thinking, stating,

We strive every day. We ask teachers to remember, think, and keep in the forefront of
their mind that every child in this school is a special child. Every child needs to have an
opportunity to have the best education possible”.

Summary

Across all cases, the participants in this study exhibited positive attitudes about the
inclusion program. They reported that they opted to teach in an inclusion classroom setting by
their own choice. It is worth noting that in other schools the inclusion teachers are asked by their
school principals to be an inclusion teacher. Additionally, participants demonstrated a sense of
individual responsibility about their students’ best interest, and they showed a high level of
dedication to their students. They shared their firm beliefs about the academic, social, and
emotional gains students, including students with disabilities, are able accomplish in an inclusion
classroom environment. Most inclusion teachers indicated that they have high expectations of all
students, for they conceive that students have different abilities to learn and chose to look at each
student beyond his/her labeling disabilities. Eleven out of 16 participants indicated that they
celebrate their students’ success to improve their self-esteem. Across all cases, school principals and teachers stated that they try to remain focused on their mission which is to include all students in all learning programs and to ensure their success. Thus, teachers’ and school principals’ high self-efficacy, conviction about the benefits of the inclusion program, high student expectations, and a sense of purpose supported the implementation of a successful inclusion program at these schools.

**Theme 2: Relationships.** In the three schools where I conducted this study, school principals exhibited an active role in creating supportive relationships with their inclusion teachers. They described their efforts to be based on maintaining (a) an *open-line of communication* with their teachers and (b) on providing them *professional development* opportunities to improve their teaching competencies. Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that skillful leaders in human resource activities focus a good deal of their attention on the fit between human needs and the organization’s goals.

*Open line of communication.* All three school principals and inclusion teachers reported that they support each other by maintaining an open line of communication with each other. SPLC1 shared, “I make sure …They know they have support…If they feel isolated, that does not make for a good year”. SETA1 described her school principal, stating that, “She is always willing to listen if there is any issue that we have. She is always willing to work with it”. SETA2 stated, “I have access to our school principal whenever I need to share my ideas”. SETB1 described, “We work together and we communicate with each other as a team”. GETA3 said, “it is just that day-to-day communication about what the students need and where they are struggling”. Additionally, inclusion teachers from these schools reported that they try to keep an
open line of communication, even when they are out of school. SETC1 stated, “Most of the general education teachers have blogs. I check the blogs frequently to make sure that I am on the same page… Calling, texting over the weekend”.

Thus, across all cases, school principals and inclusion teachers reported that having an open line of communication was critical in creating a supportive network. The understanding that through regular communication teachers can support each other and support their students was prevalent in all these schools. SPLB1 stated, “So we really try to open the door for all our teachers to be able to serve the students in the best way possible”.

**Professional development.** All three school principals I interviewed explained that providing their teachers training opportunities was crucial to enabling them to meet the needs of their students successfully. Some special education teachers and general education teachers described their professional development experience as relevant and productive. SPLA1 stated, “Professional development supports teachers, which in return, supports the children”. GETA1 described her professional development program, saying, “I have taken professional development on differentiation instruction, which was important, because that is the number one thing”. GETA2 explained, “So we have lots of trainings on how to differentiate instruction so that we are all learning the same skills and topics, but we might go about doing it in different way”.

Across all cases, the training was reported to be available to them and was described as helpful in terms of meeting the needs of students. School leaders and some teachers shared that they have experienced success after attending training on differentiation of instruction and students’ behavior management. SETB1 described her school principal’s efforts in providing
training opportunities, stating, “My knowledge about Autism was not as great. So she made every effort to make sure that I had all the tools I need…She makes sure we get training we need”.

**Summary**

Across all cases, participants shared that enjoy strong relationships at their schools at both the personal and professional levels. All participants’ responses indicated that the open door communication policy practiced by these school leaders has helped inclusion teachers in voicing their personal and professional needs. This ongoing communication between school leaders and teachers was also practiced between general education and special education teachers. Three out of four special education teachers described communication with their school principals and peer general education teachers to be conducive to success in meeting the needs of students. Seven out of nine general education teachers expressed their satisfaction with access to their school principal and peer special education teachers. Thus, the focus of these school principals and teachers on strengthening their relationships through communication facilitated the success of these schools. Additionally, 15 out of 16 participants recognized that the professional development programs either on site, off site, or on-line have been conducive to improving teaching skills and students’ performance. Nine out of nine general education teachers acknowledged that the trainings they attended were helpful in terms of dealing with autistic children, differentiating instruction, and managing behavioral issues. Three special education teachers out of four expressed their satisfaction with the training they received from their school district. Thus, an open door communication policy instilled by these three school leaders was instrumental in strengthening personal and professional relationships. It is worth noting that professional development activities in these schools were more often carried out in groups or in
pairs, and as such, they were dependent upon strong teacher relationships. Positive relationships and relevant trainings have fostered a successful implementation of the inclusion program at these schools.

**Theme 3: Collaboration.**

While human resource approach deals with issues by changing people, the structural perspective argues for putting people in the right roles and relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Across all cases, collaboration was manifested through a different degree of presence of three collaborative practices at each school:

(a) **planning time**, (b) **knowledge of rules and procedures** governing the special education services, and (c) **the students’ placement**. According to some researchers, it is likely that the particulars regarding collaboration at schools vary depending on the context of a given school (Fullan, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006).

**Planning time.** All three school principals indicated that they are diligent about giving their inclusion teachers time they need to plan together as a team because, they explained, such collaboration benefits all students. Across all cases, planning time was commonly reported as critical for improving teachers’ collaboration and planning. SPLA1 stated, “Making sure that our special education teachers are embedded to all common planning with our general education teachers. Giving them time to plan”. SPLB1 indicated that, “We encourage them to have common planning together. We try to be very collaborative between our teachers and the administration so that we can help serve kids in the best way”. SPLC1 reported, “I make sure they have some time in their day to plan”.
Although these statements reveal positive beliefs and efforts to improve collaboration at these schools, some participants indicated that they are consulting with their school principals for additional planning time, and others shared that they often use personal time to plan with their peer teachers. Five out of nine general education teachers claimed that they receive time they need to plan and to collaborate. GETC2 shared, “I think collaboration with my colleagues is great. We meet once a week in the morning to go over our game plans. We share our lesson plans, we share our ideas”. GETA1 stated, “We do lots of collaborating outside the work time”. SETB1 described, “We are in constant contact with each other. We do a lot of face-to-face talking and collaborating on strategies”. GETB1 indicated that she collaborates with her peer teachers even outside school hours: “We have common planning time, which is always beneficial. We do a lot of collaboration outside of work time, before school, or after school”. Four other general education teachers claimed that they could use additional time for planning and collaboration. GETA5 explained, “Sometimes, she is in class during my last minute…It is hard with scheduling”. SETC expressed her views about the planning and collaboration time, stating, “I know the administration has been working to try to make that happen next year [planning time] because we have to be in there to service students”.

These statements suggest that, over all, teachers’ collaboration in these schools is a combination of personal and professional efforts. That is, some teachers dedicate their off-work time to collaborate and to plan. They also take advantage of their personal technological communication tools to stay in touch with each other. Eight teachers from these schools reported that they text, call each other, or meet after or before school hours to discuss their lesson plans.
All 13 inclusion teachers acknowledged that their school principals have been flexible with time they need to plan and to collaborate.

**Knowledge.** All across cases, participants recognized that their knowledge about special education improved by attending trainings and pursuing additional teaching certifications. Some participants reported that their knowledge about special education areas was instrumental in strengthening their collaboration with their peers and their understanding of the specific needs of students. All three school principals emphasized the importance of knowing rules and procedures pertaining to special education services. SPLC1 mentioned, “Our teachers attend workshops on inclusion or on differentiating instruction”. SPLA1 said, “Teachers should be trained as far as how to correctly write an IEP, how to read it, and, most importantly, how to implement it”. All inclusion teachers described their knowledge about special education to be productive. They reported that they share their expertise and support each other in meeting the needs of students successfully. GETA2 said, “I know that my peer teachers appreciate my help in reading and understanding IEPs. I use data to share with them where the student is and where we want him/her to go”. GETC1 shared, “We all have a special education degree. So that is a start”. Inclusion teachers have also reported that having a school principal who is knowledgeable about special education areas helps them in implementing the inclusion program. SETA1 indicated, “Our school principal is great. She was an ESE teacher…So she has some sympathy for some of the things that might be going on and understanding…That in itself is very supportive”. GETA4 explained, “She has a good understanding of the fact that my children, many times, have different needs, so she allows me to be more flexible in my lesson planning”. Across all cases, participants indicated that by sharing their expertise about different areas of special education,
they strengthen relationships, collaboration, and understanding of the students’ needs. According to MacLeskey and Waldron (2002), opportunities to share expertise and to learn from each other improve professional satisfaction and instructional practices.

Placement of students. All across cases from these three schools, placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom was reported as a supportive practice. All participants reported that they have a small classroom size, that students with disabilities are equally distributed among inclusion classes, and that, when necessary, some students are serviced in a pull-out setting. School principals indicated that they pay careful attention to the increase in numbers of students with disabilities. SPLC1 reported, “Before the start of school, we try to look at all the students we have when we are setting up inclusion classrooms, so that…they are spread out. SPLB1 explained,

We keep track of our numbers very steadily because when we have placement meetings, we do try to make sure our numbers are not getting too high. We try to work diligently with the district to support us and make sure [sic] that we can keep our numbers, as much as possible, under twenty.

In regard to pulling out students from the general education classroom, school principals opted to keep this option to be used as a safety net. SPLB1 described, “Also, strategies that have worked for us are to do small pull-out when necessary to work with students who need extra support”. GETB2 shared that, “I would like to see them more successful, and I think they could if they had more differentiated pull-out programs. SPLA1 explained, “The inclusion setting is not for all students for all times. There are some of those children that do need to be pulled-out… We need to support children who fall in between”. The participants’ quotations demonstrate the care
school principals and inclusion teachers take to implement best placement services possible to all students being assigned in an inclusion classroom. Maintaining a small inclusion classroom size, ensuring a balanced distribution of students with disabilities, and providing flexibility in servicing some students in a pull-out setting were structural practices which participants described as supportive and conducive to a successful teaching and learning endeavor.

**Summary**

Across all cases, collaboration was reported to be a supportive practice that fosters professional satisfaction and improves instructional practices. Most of these participants perceive that collaboration at their school has been facilitated by the time allocated by their school principals for planning. Most participants agree that knowledge about special education areas was instrumental in strengthening their collaboration and relationships. All participants reported that their school principals were flexible and understanding in relation to students’ placements in the inclusion classroom and pull-out settings. All participants’ statements suggested that they feel fortunate to teach in a school with strong collaborative opportunities and supportive relationships, which they perceive to be supportive to the implementation of a successful inclusion program.

**Theme 4: Distributive Leadership and resources.** The 16 interviews I conducted in three elementary public schools revealed that all three school leaders and inclusion teachers practiced a distributive leadership approach to strengthen collaboration and to meet the schools’ goals. All 13 inclusion teachers reported that their school principals empowered them by giving them the *autonomy* to make up their own schedules, by involving them in the decision-making process regarding placements of students in the inclusion classrooms, and by allowing them the
freedom to decide on instructional strategies to implement in order to meet the needs of students.

All teachers reported that their school leaders fought for them before the school district to ensure they have the necessary resources to do their job.

Across all cases, participants shared that they are given leadership opportunities such as creating their own schedules and making instructional decisions. They reported that they are not being micromanaged. They indicated that they feel empowered and trusted by their school principals. GETC1 described this position, stating, “Our school principal gives us flexibility in making our own planning and scheduling time. This flexibility is a major factor. We do feel at this school that we are not being looked at by a microscope”. GETB2 emphasized, “We are not micromanaged. So we are allowed that freedom and that is important”. GETA3 stated, “You know, we are in charge of our own schedule”. GEAT1 said, “We also try to group students together into different classrooms that have the same service needs from the ESE teacher. That makes it a little bit easier for her to pull them”. GETA1 reported, “We are given a lot of flexibility in the classroom. Our teacher judgement is appreciated. We are not dictated to deal with children. We are given the flexibility to work with them the way we see fit”. SETA2 described her school principal, stating, “…Allowing us to take the lead and her not giving us the schedule…Really, the biggest thing is flexibility. I was experienced, so she trusted that I kind of knew what I was doing”.

All three school principals shared that they try to involve their inclusion teachers in the decision making process. SPLB1 explained that decisions relative to students’ placement are collaboratively shared during meetings with staff. She mentioned, “We keep track of our numbers very steadily because when we have placement meetings, we do try to make sure our
numbers are not getting too high”. SPLC1 explained that, “Inclusion works best when teachers working together, reviewing student information, data, IEPs…Teachers can provide scheduling”. GETA1 described this decision making process, saying that, “Every classroom has to come up with a schedule and we try to coordinate with our ESE support teachers”.

Across all cases, 15 out of 16 participants indicated that their school principals advocate for them to ensure they have the resources and materials they need. SPLA1 stated, “Oh yes, I think that we have the materials that we need. They have space, they have computers. I feel that they have basically what they need as far as teacher’s edition, and if they don’t, I know my teachers will share”. GETA1 shared, “She [school principal] is very supportive with helping us find resources”. GETA2 reported, “When I need additional computers for my students…textbooks as well… She is always helpful”. SPLB1 mentioned, “We also try to request materials that would be of support to the children…We have also been able to order separate materials for several years for our ESE students”. SCPLC1 stated, “They [inclusion teachers] have access to more materials so that we can order through the district based on what they need”. GETB1 indicated, “The district does a really good job of providing us with manipulatives to help with kids.

However, in relation to providing additional special education teachers to schools, most participants expressed skeptical comments. SPLB1 stated, “We try to advocate for as many positions as we can at the school. We try to make sure that we are supportive for the number of children that we have and we are in constant contact with the district”. GETC1 reported, “I think having an extra body in there that can help facilitate your general education population as well as the inclusion student is the best way”. SPLA1 explained,
“We do need to look at a lower ratio because we do have a large population, we could use four teachers, but budget sometimes does not allow it”.

Summary

Across all cases, three school principals and 13 inclusion teachers reported that at their schools the principles of distributive leadership have been implemented. All participants indicated that they have been satisfied with the leadership style their school principals embraced. They shared that they appreciate being trusted to make their own decisions relative to scheduling, selecting own training programs, and making instructional choices. They expressed their contentment with their school principals who get them involved in the decision-taking process in relation to staffing students. They indicated that their school principals advocate for them to have all the materials they need such as manipulatives, textbooks, and computers. MacLeskey and Waldron (2002a) asserted that distributive leadership is indispensable for schools that try to develop inclusive practices. All participants shared that the application of distributive leadership principles at their schools supports their efforts to implementing a successful inclusion program.

Theme 5: Inclusive instruction. All participants reported that they use inclusive instructional practices to ensure that all students are included in the learning process. They indicated that they implement instructional accommodations and employ the Differentiation of Instruction (DI) model. Brown (2004) asserted that differentiation of instruction is an instructional method that enables students who exhibit different abilities to receive an appropriate education in the general education classroom, while accommodations are changes in the ways a student access learning. Participants reported that they use Response to Interventions
(RtI) to remediate students’ deficiencies at an early stage, and they use technology to allow each student to work on his/her own pace. GETA1 stated, “I took several classes in differentiation of instruction, which was important…That is the number one thing”. SPLA1 indicated that “…Training on different strategies so that children can benefit”. GETA3 explained that she implements the accommodation as prescribed in the students’ IEPs. “It depends on what is in their IEP”. GETB1 stated, “In lots of ways, RtI can be good because we are quick to try to identify children…I love to integrate technology as well…It is so tangible. It really benefits them”.

**Summary**

Across cases, participants described that they employ a variety of inclusive instructional interventions to ensure access to learning to all students. All participants indicated that they implement the *Differentiation of Instruction* model in their classrooms, they employ *accommodations* as prescribed in each student’s IEP, they implement *Response to Intervention* (RtI) and they use *technology*. These instructional interventions were unanimously reported as supportive to the implementation of the inclusion program. However, just as each disability/ability manifests itself differently in each individual, the suite of *accommodations* and *differentiation of instruction* implemented by each inclusion teacher were also reported to be different. The most common instructional interventions special education teachers and general education teachers said they use to include all students in the learning process are presented in Table 5.
Table 5

Inclusive Instructional Practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Special Ed. Teacher</th>
<th>Instructional interventions</th>
<th>General Ed. Teacher</th>
<th>Instructional interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School A | SETA1 | • Small group setting  
• Repetition  
• Shortened tasks | GETA4 | • Manipulatives  
• Reading directions  
• Shortened assignments  
• Modeling |
|         | SETA2 | • Small group setting  
• Repetition  
• Chunking  
• Shortened tasks | GETA2 | • Peer tutoring  
• Extra time  
• Shortened assignments  
• Positive reinforcement |
| School B | SETB1 | • Small group setting  
• Repetition  
• Pull-out  
• Hands-on activities | GETB1 | • Kinesthetic learning  
• Hands-on activities  
• Small group setting |
|         | GETB2 | • Peer tutoring  
• RTI  
• Small group setting | | |
| School C | SETC1 | • Small group setting  
• Extra time  
• Shortening tasks  
• Breaks as needed | GETC1 | • Small group setting  
• Positive reinforcement |
|         | GETC2 | • Small group setting  
• Probing |

Note. Small group setting was reported by participants as accommodations and as centers for DI.

Classroom Observations

The teachers I observed were some of the same teachers I interviewed and they were identified in the same fashion to ensure confidentiality. These observations occurred during reading and math sessions. The instructional interventions I targeted in these classroom observation are displayed in Appendix F. The focus was on identifying whether or not a
teacher’s instructional interventions corroborate his/her statements in the interview. Each classroom observation lasted 30-45 minutes. Classroom observations ceased when it was decided that the information being collected was, in fact, repetitious of previously collected data--that is, when saturation occurred (Morse 1994). The inclusion teachers I observed are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

*Classroom Observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Inclusion Classrooms</th>
<th>Students w/Disabilities</th>
<th>School Principal</th>
<th>Special Ed. Teacher</th>
<th>General Ed. Teacher</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SETA1, SETA2</td>
<td>GETA4, GETA2</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>GETB1, GETB2</td>
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<td>School C</td>
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<td>SETC1</td>
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*Note.* Out of 13 inclusion teachers, I observed 10.

**School A.**

At School A I observed 5th grade and 4th grade Inclusion classrooms. All four teachers were experienced in both general and special education areas (see Table 3 for demographic information). The notes I accumulated about the 5th and 4th classroom observations were the following:
Fifth grade inclusion classroom. There were 22 students in this classroom, including six students with disabilities. One student was diagnosed with dyslexia, two students were reported as having specific learning disabilities, one student was recognized with severe autism, one student qualified for 504 services, and one student was diagnosed with other health impairments (OHI). Students’ desks were arranged in four columns and five rows with two additional desks on each side of the teacher’s desk. A round table with five chairs and laptops was situated in the right corner of the classroom. Students’ work, as well as their handwritten posters and personal pictures, were taped on one wall of the classroom. Science and math posters were posted on the opposite classroom walls. All students had a clear visual access to the white board and to the overhead projector that were placed in front of the classroom. The general education teacher and the special education teacher were both able to access each individual student as they were walking around the classroom.

During my observation, the topic was on life span of different animals. Students were responsible for presenting their work through a power point presentation. Both the general and the special education teachers were fulfilling the role of facilitators. The first group was made of four students: One was presenting the materials orally in conjunction with a second student who was switching between pages and making sure each page reflected what the first student was describing. A third student was addressing questions from the audience, and a fourth student was taking notes and consulting with her three peers intermittently. The presentation was about the life span of a tiger. Students were listening and asking questions. Both teachers were assisting students rephrasing the questions and the answers. The general education teacher was grading the group based on a rubric, and the special education teacher was supporting the group with their
presentation. Every question was followed by encouragement from both teachers, and every answer was expanded on by both teachers. Both teachers, throughout the presentation, kept reminding their students that it is recommendable to say “I do not know” when the question or the answer is difficult to grasp, and that all questions and all answers are good questions and good answers. That is, both teachers were encouraging participation and making sure that no student was excluded. This approach was evidence of a deep commitment to the mission of teaching all students and holding all of them accountable for participating in class.

**Fourth grade inclusion classroom.** There were 21 students in this classroom, of whom seven were reported as having learning disabilities. Three students were placed in the general education classroom as having Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). Two students were diagnosed with Other Health Impairments (OHI). One student was Speech Impaired (SI), and the seventh student was recognized as having Language Impairment (LI). The students’ desks were diagonally arranged in four desks. In the corner of the classroom was a long table where six desktops were stationed. In the opposite corner was a kidney-shaped table where both teachers interchangeably instructed students in small group and individual settings. Reading strategy posters, classroom behavior rules, and individual student’s work were posted on the four walls of the classroom. A carpet was in the middle of the classroom, along with beanbag chair and many reading books in shelves.

Students were quietly completing a Venn diagram comparing rural and city economic activities. Both teachers were walking around the class assisting students with information needed to complete their task. A student raised his hands expressing his frustration with the assignment. The special education teacher approached the student and walked him to the sample
Venn diagram posted on the whiteboard. After a few seconds of talking with each other, the student went back to his desk with a smile on his face. The teacher opted to stay with the student and work with him till he showed enough mastery and self-confidence to complete his work independently. As she moved to another group of students, that student was deeply engaged on his work. Thus, the teacher’s intervention was immediate and effective to put her student on track. Both teachers were aware of the content as well as the presentation of materials related to the assigned task, which indicates close collaboration between the special education teacher SETA2 and the general education teacher GETA2. Both teachers were alert as to which student to assist and how to provide the appropriate accommodation for that student. When the general education teacher saw that her peer teacher started circulating around the class, she took a chair and sat down close to another student who needed help with the assignment and worked with her for about ten minutes. This transition between the two teachers continued as most students in class were working independently. Thus, both teachers were working together to address the need of each individual student while keeping an eye on the entire classroom. Their movements were well coordinated to ensure that each individual student and all students were receiving the support they need.

School B.

At School B, I observed a 3rd grade and 4th grade inclusion classrooms (see Table 6). Both teachers have been trained in special education and general education. They both have more than 10 years teaching experience in an inclusion setting (refer to Table 3 for demographic information).
The third grade inclusion classroom. At School B, the 3rd grade inclusion classroom I observed consisted of 21 students. Nine students were identified with learning disabilities. Three students were diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities (SLD), four students were diagnosed with language impairment (LI), one student was experiencing other health impairments (OHI), and one student was speech impaired (SI). The special education teacher and the general education teacher were experienced teachers and trained on both special education and general education areas (see Table 3). Students’ desks were arranged in rows following a “hammerhead shark” format with the longer row in the middle. Behind the middle line was a small rounded table with four chairs and on the side was a kidney-shaped table. Photos of individual students were hanging on the wall. The overhead projector was in front of the classroom. Behind the round table and the kidney-shaped table were two medium size whiteboards. All students had a clear visual access to the overhead projector, and they were all sitting close enough to hear the teacher’s instruction. The classroom was very clean and well-organized.

The general education teacher stood behind the overhead projector facing students, and the special education teacher was circulating among students, providing individual assistance. The topic of the day was a test review on multiplication and word problems. The general education teacher reminded students about fairness, explaining that since the test was given by a substitute teacher, she was not sure how directions to the test were given and that she prefers to give them a second chance. This approach indicates that the teacher relies on data to make instructional decisions. The general education teacher began by reviewing the mechanics of two-digit multiplication operations. She was following the “I do, we do, and you do” teaching
approach. While the general education teacher was explaining how to perform two-digit multiplication operations, the special education teacher was circulating among students to increase their attention to task and to provide individual support when needed. Following the teacher’s explanation and modeling, students were asked to complete the few operations on their own. Students displayed their work using their individual dry erase board. Both teachers seemed to be at ease deciding on the next step without stopping the flow of instruction. When the special education teacher made more than one stop to support more than one student, the general education teacher understood that she should repeat instruction on the same skill to make sure that all students understood the task at hand before moving to the next skill. Thus, nonverbal communication between the two teachers suggested that these teachers share a positive working relationship. I also noticed that the special education teacher does interject to elaborate and to comment on a concept while the other was teaching a whole class. Both teachers exchanged role between interacting with all students and providing individual instruction. The transitions occurred naturally, for both teachers knew the content and each individual student’s needs. I have noticed that the two inclusion teachers share mutual respect regarding their interventions and beliefs. When I asked both teachers about their collaboration, they indicated a genuine trust for each other, which appeared to positively facilitate their teaching.

As the general education teacher moved to word problem solving, the special education teacher pulled four students to the round table to provide additional support with the mechanics of the multiplication operations. Three other students were assigned to computers, and the rest of the class was reviewing their test results with general education teacher. This transition from a whole group setting to a small group setting demonstrates that these teachers differentiate their
instruction based on an individual student’s needs. The ability to make such an instructional transition indicates a high level of collaboration between the two teachers. Zigmond and Magiera (2001) pointed out that a major collaboration involves (a) an increasing access to a wide range of instructional options for students with disabilities, (b) fostering participation of students with disabilities in the inclusion setting, and (c) enhancing the academic performance of students with disabilities. At the end of the observation, the general education teacher explained to me that the dry-erase individual board is both a learning and teaching strategy that allows her and her partner to foster students’ accountability and provide them with a quick visual access to analyze who needs individual support--and when to proceed to the next level of instruct.

Fourth grade inclusion classroom. At School B, I observed both the 4th grade general education teacher and special education teacher delivering a math lesson on one-digit division operations. Both teachers have more than ten years of experience teaching students with disabilities in different settings of the continuum (see Table 3). There were 23 students in this classroom, including eight students who have learning disabilities. Five students were recognized as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), two students were diagnosed with Other Health Impairments (OHI), and one student was placed as being Language Impaired (LI). All students’ desks were arranged in a group of five. A long table with seven chairs was at the end of the classroom where seven desktops were available to students, and a kidney-shaped table with six chairs and laptops was placed in the left corner of the classroom. Behind students’ cubbies was placed a medium size basketball hoop. The teacher’s desk was next to the classroom door. I noticed that both teachers had access to this desk.
The lesson was on a review of exponential notation. Both teachers were circulating among what they call “stations”, where students are grouped based on data pertaining to their performance on the lesson being taught. Stations were numbered from 1 to 5. According to both teachers, the rotation of students assigned to each station differs from one lesson to the other, depending on each student’s performance on the weekly assessment of the skill being introduced. That is, in station 1, six students were completing assignments on computers for enrichment, in station 2, I noticed five students working with SETB2, and in station 4 and 5, I saw students engaged with each other discussing how to respond to questions the teacher assigned to them on a math worksheet. GETB2 was circulating among the five stations to provide support to individual students and groups of students. I heard much positive feedback from the teacher as he was circulating between stations. Often, the teacher was calling on individual students to take a shot at the basketball hoop as reward and recognition of the student’s accurate answer and hard work. Prior to allowing each individual student to hang his/her work on the classroom wall, the student was expected to share his/her work with the whole classroom to foster accountability and all students were asked to show with their own work why they agreed or disagreed. Both teachers were fully engaged with students and appeared to have a great understanding of the expected role and contribution of each. I did not see them talking to each other during the entire 45 minutes I spent in their classroom. This nonverbal understanding indicates that both teachers do often communicate with each other about their individual students’ needs and that they both are aware of the learning strategies they agreed to implement in class. According to SPETB2, on few occasions, she pulls out students who are falling far behind to catch them up with the rest of the class. Both teachers believe that a pull-out intervention could be used as a safety net, for not
all students could succeed in an inclusion setting all the time. Both teachers explained to me that the school principal gives them the flexibility they need to ensure that all students are learning and that they are having access to resources they need to succeed.

School C.

I observed two 5th grade inclusion classrooms (see Table 6). All inclusion teachers at this school were experienced teachers and trained in special education and general education areas (refer to Table 3 for demographic information.

First 5th inclusion classroom. There were 20 students in this classroom, including seven students with disabilities. Among these students, four were reported as having Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), one student was diagnosed with Other Health Impairment (OHI), one student was diagnosed with severe Orthopedic Impairment (OI), and one student was placed in this inclusion classroom as autistic. The Orthopedic Impaired student had her professionally-rained dog sitting under her desk. Students’ desks were arranged in groups of four. The classroom walls were packed with students’ individual hand-written work. Plenty of books were stacked on shelves. The general education teacher was reading out loud to a group of seven students who were quietly listening and writing notes in their reading journals. The special education teacher was conferencing with one student at a time and providing her feedback on conventional writing skills. Four students were working independently on writing an essay. Other students were busy searching for books on the shelves and quietly interacting with each other. This activity lasted for 40 minutes. No disruption or distraction from the learning process was noticed. The dog was viewed by all students as one of them. From time to time, I saw a student passing by and saying, “Hi, Mark” and gently patting the dog. SETC1 mentioned in her interview that the idea is to
create a “learning community” in each classroom. Thus, the desire to include all students was clearly demonstrated in this classroom. Both teachers were friendly and respectful to each other as they were exchanging students’ work with their personal written feedback. They called each student by first name to offer encouragement and positive feedback on a work well done. Students were happily engaged in their work and politely interacting with each other. Students were genuinely supporting and appreciating each other. Collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers was clearly demonstrated by inclusion teachers.

Second 5th grade inclusion classroom. The second 5th grade inclusion classroom has 20 students, among whom six students were diagnosed with learning disabilities. Two of these students were placed in the general education classroom as having Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). Three students were determined to have Other Health Impairments (HOI), and one student was recognized as having a severe form of autism. Both GETC2 and SETC2 have experience working with students with disabilities and students without disabilities in a variety of settings, including self-contained classrooms (refer to Table 3 for demographic information).

At the time I observed this classroom, students were collecting data on chicks. Both special and general education teachers were enthusiastic about the lesson of the day. At that time several eggs were hatching and the students’ excitement was noticeable. They were interacting with each other, sharing their data, and explaining their chart to each other and with their teachers. Both teachers were conversing with students and redirecting their efforts to charting their data correctly. There was no indication about each teacher’s specific role, for they were both instructing their students on the same skills. Both teachers were encouraging students to talk to each other about the data they had collected. They were acknowledging the effort of each
student and providing encouragement for each accomplishment. Teachers promised students that next time they would record this experiment to allow students to share it with their parents. Additional support for few students was offered on an individual basis by both teachers to ensure participation and learning to those who needed most. Both teachers were switching their intervention between talking to individual students and to the whole class, indicating as they saw fit. This approach was evidence that both teachers understand and respect each other. All students seemed to respond with equal enthusiasm to both teachers, which indicated that students recognize their teachers’ dedication and support. Prior to leaving to another classroom, students were following the special education teacher to the door to share with her their charted data. At that point, the general education teacher decided to turn the attention of her student to watch a documentary about the life-cycle of chicks. Students regained their seats and sat quietly to watch the video presentation.

**Summary of classroom observations at the three schools A, B, and C.**

The recurring events I observed in these three schools’ inclusion classrooms corroborated most of the teachers’ responses to the interview questions pertaining to practices they perceive to be supportive to the inclusion program. Classroom observations across the three schools yielded noticeable similarities in the ways special education teachers and general education teachers collaborate in planning and delivering instruction to students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom setting. During these observations general education teachers and special education teachers demonstrated positive working relationships, flexibility, respect, expertise in the content areas, and understanding of their student’s individual academic and behavior needs. For example, on many instances, I noticed that the role changing between general education teacher
and special education teacher was often effectuated with respect and smoothness, indicating a high level of training on co-teaching and collaboration. Most teachers I interviewed reported a strong personal and professional relationship with each other. They all shared in their interviews that they value each other’s strengths and unique skills. This positive professional and personal relationship was translated to a positive and motivating communication with students. In all three schools, I noticed that each student was addressed on a first name basis and each student’s question or need was met with positive and prompt response. Teachers use positive comments and tangible rewards to reward students’ effort. On the instructional level, teachers’ interventions were focused on including all students in the learning process. For example, it was common to see in these three schools both general education and special education teachers sitting with small groups of students addressing different levels and abilities and using a variety of accommodations and adaptations to foster understanding of the materials at hand. I have also noticed at these schools that teachers encourage their students to share their work. As reported in the interviews, teachers understand that students with and without disabilities benefit from interacting with each other. Thus, these values and practices, as reported in the interviews and observed in the classrooms, appear to support the implementation of a successful inclusion program in these schools. Students with disabilities in in these three schools in particular, outscored the district and the state performance on standardized assessments (see Table 1 for information on schools’ and students’ performances).

Document analysis.

All participants I interviewed in this study indicated that they perceive cultural, human resource, structural, leadership and resources, and instructional activities as supportive practices
relative to the inclusion program at their schools. To seek additional evidence about these supportive practices and processes, I analyzed the following documents: (a) teacher’s lesson plans and collaboration plans, and (b) 2014-2015 School Improvement Plans (SIPs).

**Teachers’ lesson plans and collaboration plans.** According to special education teachers’ and general education teachers’ lesson plans and collaboration plans, there was written evidence that these teachers communicate on a daily basis about shared instructional responsibilities. For example, goals and objectives were based on each student’s IEP. Teachers’ lesson plans included similar notes about each student’s specific adaptations and accommodations, the length of time involved with these academic interventions, and a brief description of the materials that would be used during instruction and assessments. Thus, both the general education teacher’s and special education teacher’s lesson plans indicate the presences of common planning and collaboration efforts.

**School Improvement Plan (SIP).** The state-approved SIPs in three public elementary schools were downloaded from the district’s website. The Florida Department of Education encourages schools to use the SIP as a “living document” by continually updating, refining, and using plans to guide their work throughout the school year. I used the School Improvement Plans (SIP) to seek written evidence relative to practices and processes participants reported in their interviews to be supportive to the implementation of the inclusion program at their schools. The assumption was that each school integrates inclusive practices in its SIP to demonstrate the school’s intent to support the implementation of the inclusion program.

**School A.** The school’s mission statement was, “Where education is a treasure and every child is inspired to reach for her/his dreams”. The school principal and inclusion teachers at this
school indicated that they are committed to the mission of educating all students. According to the school’s SIP, teachers would be given the opportunity to observe and learn from their peers and participate in professional learning communities. Additionally, the school would develop a master schedule to allow common planning time among grade level teachers, as well as vertically, among subject-areas teachers. The school’s SIP indicates that the school would organize and to maintain school-based leadership meetings to problem-solve concerns related to students and staff and to ensure that teachers have the necessary materials they need. School A specifically described in its SIP that teachers would be accountable for using strategies that assist students who are having difficulties attaining a proficient or advanced level on state assessments. These strategies would include differentiating instruction, pulling out students, using small group settings, providing additional skill practices at home, and having students work with support staff members to build academic skills in the areas of deficiency. School A’s SIP included reading, math, and writing objectives targeting students in the bottom quartile in each subgroup. The reading and math objectives for School A suggest that by the end of 2014 the percentage of non-proficient students (students scoring less than 3 on FCAT) would decrease by at least 50%. Key terms and phrases in the school’s SIP such as FCAT 2.0, bottom quartile, differentiated instruction, flexible small groups, one-on-one assistance, and targeted subgroups suggest the presence of inclusive instructional practices at School A.

**School B.** The school’s mission stated, “School B is committed to providing differentiated, standards-based instruction that will allow all students to achieve their goals and use their knowledge to be successful in a culturally diverse and technological advanced world”. Participants from School B demonstrated that they are dedicated to building a community of
learners. According to the SIP, the school would implement strategies to encourage positive working relationships between teachers. For example, the school would implement the “Working on Work” strategy every early dismissal day. The school’s SIP indicates that the school would engage in improving relationships with the community. All teachers would be expected to collaboratively establish expectations for high-quality instruction. The school’s SIP explicitly included professional developments for teachers to learn to implement Response to Intervention (RtI) for all tiers and to provide accommodations and modifications according the student’s IEP or 504 plan. According to School B’s SIP, teachers would receive professional development opportunities to improve volume reading and vocabulary instruction. The SIP clearly stated that teachers will be trained on how to use technology programs within their center rotations to enhance lessons such as iReady, IXL, and Gizmos. According to the school’s SIP, the school would implement several intervention strategies to improve the academic performance of students who have been identified at the bottom quartile. Students’ instructional needs would be addressed and monitored by the administrative team in collaborative planning sessions by grade level and by departmentalization areas. The Vertical Reading Committee (VLC) at this school would focus on developing and maintaining a problem-solving system to bring the best out in teachers and students. The team would decide on which training and resources would be needed to meet the learning needs of students. Key terms such as small group settings, center rotations, RtI, technology, bottom quartile, and student’s needs suggest that School B was actively implementing inclusive instructional practices.

School C. The school’s mission states that, “The school will attain educational excellence by providing [sic] a safe and nurturing environment, opportunities for character building and
academic success through rigorous instruction and relationships with the community”. The principal and inclusion teachers at this school focus on fostering students’ self-esteem. Based on the SIP, the school’s priority was to promote positive development of all students socially, emotionally, and academically. The school would provide teachers training on the implementation of Response to Intervention, the integration of technology, and the building of relationships. The school would develop structures that support personal relationships between teachers and administration and between teachers and teachers incorporating common planning time for teachers into everyday school schedule. The school would engage the community to problem-solve gaps in learning, would involve the full faculty in discussions related to the school’s mission, and would create meaningful opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively. The school’s principal would model to her staff effective leadership practices and would provide staff resources and logistical support for the implementation of instruction. For example, the Lead Literacy Team (LLT) would participate in the development of staff. The SIP indicates that students would be provided differentiated learning experiences that promote students’ choice, flexibility, independence, grouping arrangements, and small group instruction. Additionally, the SIP indicates that the administration and staff would make data-driven instructional decisions. The reading and math objectives for School C indicate that by the end of 2014 school year the percentage of students making reading gains and math gains in the lowest 25% would increase by 5%. Key terms such as differentiation of instruction, social, emotional, and academic growth of students, small group instructions, the lowest 25% group, collaboration, relationships, RtI, and “learning community” point out to the presence of inclusive instructional practices at School C.
Summary

Supportive practices relative to the inclusion program were examined throughout the texts of 2014-2015 SIPs. The focus was on analyzing written evidence pertaining to cultural, human resource, structural, leadership, and instructional practices participants reported to be supportive to the inclusion program. All three schools’ SIPs included projections to implement these practices and processes. The SIPs described strategies that would foster the implementation of practices that support the inclusion program. Key terms addressing students with disabilities or indicating inclusive practices included differentiated instruction, Response to Intervention (RtI), collaborative planning, differentiated instruction, student subgroups, accommodations, flexibility, a small group setting, additional time, and lower quartile of 25%.

It is worth noting that SIPs have audiences external to the local school community, and they may reflect some messages targeted toward district and state level audiences that may not reflect the school and classroom practices in place. Moreover, the sample was limited to elementary schools in order to limit variability ($N=3$). However, this approach provided substantial information regarding inclusive practices but confines interpretation of the findings to the three schools included in the study.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A large body of literature investigates the implication of the inclusion program on students with and without learning disabilities’ learning performance. Much attention was focused on the obstacles that hinder the implementation of the inclusion program (Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kavale & Forness, 2000; King & Cummings, 1996). Overlooked and under-researched were the positive and supportive practices and processes that foster a successful implementation of the inclusion programs (Dipaola, Tschmaen-Moran, & Thomas, 2004; McGhie et al., 2013; Praisner, 2003). Three participating public elementary schools in this study suggest that a successful inclusion program can be highly considered within reach. Across all cases, participants reported practices and processes which, they perceive, have supported them in implementing the inclusion program. The narratives shared by the participants in this study indicate that positive values and beliefs relative to the inclusion program, a balanced leadership approach to teachers’ human and professional needs and schools’ goals, strong collaborative structures within the schools, distributive leadership and availability of resources, and the implementation of inclusive instructional practices can foster the implementation of a successful inclusion program that enhances all students’ learning performance. Understanding what practices and processes school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers perceive to be conducive to a successful implementation of the inclusion program was the center of this investigation. In this chapter, I will answer each of the research questions, present recommendations for policy and practice, suggest areas for future research, and conclude with a personal statement.
Conclusion

**Research Question 1: What are the inclusion teachers’ and school principals’ values and beliefs that support the inclusion program?**

Within the construct of the symbolic/cultural, a major theme emerged: (a) positive attitudes and four subthemes. All participants from the three schools where I conducted this study demonstrated a positive attitude about the inclusion program. All inclusion teachers and school principals from these three schools agreed on the following principles: 1. The inclusion program benefits students with and without disabilities academically, socially, and emotionally. 2. They all held high expectations from students with learning disabilities, and 3. Students’ success is celebrated.

Participants from these three schools indicated that the debate about whether or not to implement the inclusion program is no longer a negotiable position, for the social, emotional, and cognitive benefits of the inclusion program have been unarguably well documented by many researchers (Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003). GETA1 stated, “The socialization and the interaction benefit both sides”. SETB1 shared, “There are so many benefits – both for the child that has special needs and the general education student… They learn compassion and to be helpful. So much acceptance”. SPLC1 said, “When you are in a classroom with mixed ability students, they are picking up a lot on the social aspect of it. And-- when they have students they can compete with academically, it helps motivate them more”.

All participants shared that they hold all students, including students with disabilities, to higher standards. SPLB1 reported, “We work very diligently to make sure that students have
every opportunity to learn in an inclusive environment...that is up to the same standard as every other child has and deserves”. GETA2 stated, “The positive part in [inclusion setting] is that the students are able to make great gains in learning”. GETC2 explained that, “My favorite thing about it is watching those students succeed”. In all these three schools, inclusion teachers and school principals were able to promote the success of the inclusion program because they have invested in their mission which is based on teachers’ high expectations and strong beliefs that all students can learn high academic standards in an inclusion setting. SPLB1 stated, “Every student in our school has the same access to every program in our school. There is no drawing of lines, or differentiation in access; every child has an opportunity”. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) argued that high expectations can greatly impact a student’s learning performance. Thus, at these three elementary schools, teachers and school leaders’ positive attitudes and high expectations constituted a critical support to implementing a successful inclusion program in these schools.

In addition, teachers and school principals in these three schools demonstrated a broader understanding of inclusion. They shared that they believe in building a diverse learning community by creating opportunities to celebrate their students’ success. Winterman (2002) argued that successful inclusive classrooms should set forth a vision where all children are not only welcomed, but challenged and supported to be their best. SPLA1 stated, “So, to me, they are all celebrated along with the other children”. GETA2 shared, “We have incentives and rewards for good behavior, completing classwork, citizenship”. SPLB1 described, “Students come to the office to be recognized. We go to the classroom to recognize them”. GETC2 explained, “We keep charts in our classroom of growth and various things. When kids see that so and so scored a high grade, they jump on that.”
Across all cases, participants demonstrated a high sense of self-efficacy. At these three schools, each teacher on his/her own, decides whether or not to be an inclusion teacher. School principals at other schools choose inclusion teachers randomly or on a rotational basis and not on a voluntary basis. GETA4 stated, “I personally, I enjoy the inclusion kids, my partner and I asked for it”. GETB2 shared, “I choose to…They allow you to do that so to succeed”. SETA1 explained, “The positive attitude, the willingness to work in an inclusion setting seems to be very good practice at our school”. Thus, teachers’ self-efficacy was encouraged and valued at these three schools. This practice supports the inclusion teachers’ efforts in implementing a successful inclusion program. Rand Foundation reported that self-efficacy was positively related to student achievement (Denham & Michael, 1981). Thus, positive attitudes about the benefits of the inclusion program, high expectations from teachers, and high sense of self-efficacy relative to teaching students in an inclusion setting were all values and beliefs that supported the implementation of a successful inclusion program at these three schools.

Research Question 2: How do inclusion teachers and school principals support each other to implement the inclusion program?

When I asked inclusion teachers and school principals from these three schools to describe the support within their school relative to the implementation of the inclusion program, they overwhelmingly evoked the presence of the following elements: (a) an open line of communication, (b) a trusting and supportive relationship, and (c) productive training opportunities.

School principals from these schools reported that they encourage their inclusion teachers to maintain an open line of communication with them and with each other. SPLA1 stated,
“Teachers know where to find me if they need help”. SETA2 said, “I have access to our school principal whenever I need to share my ideas”. At these three schools, teachers rely on each other formally and informally to develop their capacity to meet the needs of students. GETA5 explained, “We just communicate regularly about our students”. SETA1 stated, “Our school principal is great…She is always willing to listen”. GETB2 shared, “We communicate before school and after school”. GETC1 indicated, “Most of the general education teachers have blogs and I check the blogs frequently to make sure I am on the same page as they--calling, texting over the weekend”. Thus, the school principal and inclusion teachers’ efforts to maintain an open line of communication strengthened both personal and professional relationships within these three schools”. SETC1 described the relationship with her peer teachers as a marriage situation: “You develop a very close relationship because you are almost in a marriage [laughs]. You just really want it to work and you are always doing what is best for these children”. SETA1 indicated, “Ok, the teachers are very helpful, and just having supportive teachers makes implementing inclusion much easier”. GETA5 reported, “We work very well as a team”. Zhu (2013) asserted that a supportive school environment, especially a supportive relationship with colleagues, encourages the innovative teaching performance of teachers.

Many teachers from these three elementary schools were aware that the relationships they experienced at their current schools with their colleagues were not common, for some have taught somewhere else and have different experiences relative to relationships with peers and administrators. Inclusion teachers from these schools feel trusted and supported by their school principals and peer teachers. GETA1 explained, “We have a very good morale at this school, and we support each other. So…just because of the morale support, we are very much like a
family…I know that she [school principal] trusts my decision. I feel supported [smiles]”. SETA2 stated, “When I was hired at this school, I knew I was not going to be micromanaged and will be supported by the school principal”. GETA3 described, “At our school, teachers work well with their colleagues…The ESE teachers are very, very supportive and very flexible in helping the general education teachers with the students. I think that is a very positive practice we have here”. SPLC1 explained, “We make sure, they [teachers] know we are here to support them”. SETB1 stated, “They have taken me under their wings and supported me all the way and helped me with anything I needed”. SPLC1 indicated, “Making sure. The most important thing is making sure they know they have support.”

Inclusion teachers at these three schools have professionally benefited from the training programs their school principals and school district provided to them to meet the learning needs of students. Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that skillful leaders in human resource focus a great deal of their attention on the fit between human needs and the organization’s goals. The goal of these school leaders was to foster a successful implementation of the inclusion program to improve all students’ learning performances. SPLA1 mentioned that, “Professional development supports teachers, which in returns supports the children”. SPLB1 reported that, “We try to include all of our teachers in those sessions [training sessions] so they all receive the same information and can take that information back to their children”. According to the inclusion teachers’ quotes from the interviews, most of their training was focused on acquiring skills that ensure access to learning to all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Participants reported that training on differentiating instruction, implementation of accommodations, communication with parents, behavior management, and collaborating on
Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were productive and helpful. GETA1 shared, “I took several classes on differentiation of instruction, which was important, because that is the number one thing”. GETA3 described, “I did a Summer Institute that was given by the district. And it was all about implementing inclusion in the classroom…That was actually, probably, the most helpful thing that I did”. GETB1 reported, “The big thing is differentiating and also grading the assessment”. SETC1 shared, “They [District] offer really good training…Differentiating reading—just how to incorporate different strategies into the classroom”. GETA4 stated, “I have gone to a lot of professional training. They have been extremely helpful”.

The school principals at these schools modeled and promoted an open line of communication policy to the staff. Teachers were communicating during, before, and after school hours through texting, e-mails, blogs, and phone calls. They reported a strong personal and professional relationship with each other. They shared that feeling trusted and supported by their school principals and peer teachers prompted them to work harder to successfully to meet the needs of students. Across cases, participants indicated that the professional developments they attended were helpful and supportive. Some teachers, after the interview had ended, shared that they are happy where they are and would not be happier anywhere else. Thus, the promotion of an open line of communication, the nurturing of a trusting and supportive relationship among staff, and the access to relevant and productive professional development programs were all practices that practices that have supported the implementation of a successful inclusion program in these three schools.
Research Question 3: Which structural practices support the inclusion program?

As previously described, all participants from these three schools reported that the relationships they had with each other gave them the opportunity to problem-solve with their colleagues to better meet their students’ learning needs. When I asked school principals and inclusion teachers to describe the structures that support the implementation of the inclusion program, collaboration was the most recurrent response. Their description of collaboration at their schools gravitated around three topics: (a) planning time, (b) knowledge of special education rules and procedures, and (c) students’ placements. Bolman and Deal (2008) asserted that planning time, knowledge of procedures and rules, and placement are structural features that support a school’s culture of collaboration.

All three school principals reported that they try their best to provide inclusion teachers time they need to plan and collaborate to ensure that both general education teachers and special education teachers are responsible for students. SPLA1 shared, “Our special education teachers are embedded in all common planning with our general education teachers, giving them time to plan”. SPLB1 stated, “We encourage them [inclusion teachers] to have common planning together”. SPLC1 indicated that she makes sure the inclusion teachers are, “Working together”.

Together, inclusion teachers from these schools used their planning time to collaborate to develop a comprehensive understanding of their lesson plans to provide their students a connected instruction. SPLA1 explained that an inclusion classroom involves “Two teachers who understand strategies that are good for all students—so that children can benefit.” GETA1 explained, “We meet regularly. We have common planning time….We forecast what is coming up, what we need to focus on, so we plan”. GETA2 indicated, “Time is set aside for us to
collaborate and look at strategies, what works well, what we could work on”. GETB1 described her collaboration with her peer special education teacher: “We do a lot of collaboration outside of work time… We look at the curriculum itself since we are teaching a new curriculum this year, so we have to hash that out a bit”. GETC2 indicated, “We usually meet once a week. We share lesson plans, we share ideas throughout the whole process. She [special education teacher] stays up on that, and she will come in, and she will know exactly what we are doing that week.”

According to all inclusion teachers from these three schools, time to plan and collaborate helps them to develop unified instructional interventions with students. In a recent study conducted by Bargerhuff (2014), sufficient time for teachers to collaborate was highly recommended to ensuring a successful implementation of the inclusion program.

School principals and inclusion teachers from these schools reported that knowledge of rules and procedures relative to special education programs was critical to strengthening collaboration among staff and to supporting the inclusion programs at their schools. SPLA1 indicated that, “My background in special education helps me to implement inclusion successfully…Teachers should be trained as far as how to correctly write an IEP, how to read it, and, most importantly, how to implement an IEP to make sure that the child is receiving the most support in the Least Restrictive Environment.” The expertise to write, read, and implement a student’s IEP does, according to GETB2, strengthens collaboration between teachers. “I know that my peer teachers appreciate my help in reading and understanding IEPs”. GETC1 suggested that her degree in special education strengthens her working and personal relationship with her peer special education teacher. “We have very similar philosophy and love for children, and we are always trying to see the best ways to reach to reach the child”. Additionally, knowledge
about special education facilitates communication between teachers and the administrators as well. GETA4 explained, “I would say she [school principal] has a good understanding of the fact that my children, many times, have different needs, so she allows me to be a little more flexible in my lesson planning”. SETA1 indicated that her school principal’s background in special education facilitates their working relationship. “Our principal is great. She was an ESE teacher...And that in itself is very supportive…She is always willing to listen if there is any issue that we have, she is always willing to work with it.” Research evidence indicates that there is a direct impact of knowledge of special education programs and related issues on improving the administrators and teachers’ abilities to implement inclusion successfully (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Thomas, 2004; Praisner, 2003).

Inclusion teachers and school principals from these schools have indicated that the number of students with learning disabilities continues to increase and that the issue of placing these students in inclusion setting while keeping teacher-student ratio fairly low has become a challenge. Participants described their collaboration on meeting this challenge by maintaining a small inclusion classroom size and providing flexible instructional setting. Bolman and Deal (2008) argued that structural leaders focus on organizing their schools to support the goals of the school. SPLB1 described, “We keep track of our numbers very steadily because when we have meetings, we do try to make sure our numbers are not getting too high….We can keep our numbers, as much as possible, under twenty”. SPLC1 explained that a small class size enables inclusion teachers to have more flexibility in teaching all their students. She said, “Smaller class size. Before the start of school, we try to look at all the students we have...So they are not all in one classroom; they are spread out”. SPLA1 stated, “We do need to look at a lower ratio
because we do have a large population….But once we contact them [district], they do send support out”.

Most inclusion teachers and all school principals reported that having the option to pull out some students enables them to provide intensive instruction to some struggling individual students in the inclusion setting. SPLA1 described the pull-out setting as a viable alternative to servicing students who are struggling in an inclusion classroom setting. “There are some of those children that do need to be pulled out and have that one-on-one or small group...We need to support children who fall in between”. GETC2 explained that she pulls out into small group settings students with and without disabilities. “We have small groups as well as ESE pull-out small groups…We do what is best for our kids”. GETA1 described her collaboration with her school principal in relation to staffing students. We do try to group students together into different classrooms that have same services”. The idea, according to GETA3, is to avoid overwhelming one teacher with students who have behavioral difficulties. “They [administrators] make sure that there aren’t any teachers that are completely overwhelmed with behavior problems or kids who have same disability…I think she [school principal] does that in a very fair way. I think that is the biggest support we receive from her”. An inclusive education requires that teachers and principals must provide all students equal access to a rich core curriculum and quality instruction (Servatius, Fellows, & Kelly, 1992). Providing to inclusion teachers time to plan and to collaborate, fostering knowledge about rules and procedures relative to special education programs, ensuring a fair distribution of students with disabilities among inclusion classroom, and allowing teachers to use pull-out settings when needed are structural practices
participants from these three schools reported to be supportive to the implementation of a successful inclusion program at their schools.

**RQ4: How does the school principal support her/his inclusion teachers?**

Within the construct of leadership, participants’ responses indicated that the *distributive leadership* style is well anchored in these three schools. This leadership approach was demonstrated on several levels across the three schools where I conducted this study. Inclusion teachers shared that their school leaders involve them in the decision-making process in relation to scheduling and students’ placement, professional development programs, instructional interventions, and distribution of resources. Researchers found that leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

All participants reported that they were supported by their school principals, who trust their decisions to create their own schedules. GETA3 indicated that inclusion teachers at her school create their own schedule. “You know, we are in charge of our own schedule”. SETA2 shared that her school principal provides her the opportunity to lead and to make her own decisions as how to schedule servicing her students in an inclusion classroom. She stated, “So just her [school principal] being flexible and kind of allowing us to take the lead and her not giving us the schedule….You know, when she hired me. The biggest thing is that she is not a micromanager, so she gives me the ability to make my own schedule”. GETC2 stated, “We make our own schedule”. Additionally, most participants in this study indicated that the decision to staff students with and without disabilities in the inclusion classrooms was based on consultation between inclusion teachers and the administrators. GETA1 described her
involvement in this decision process: “I have always been an advocate of distributing the inclusion students across the grade levels. Not just in one classroom, because we are all inclusion teachers”. SPLB1 explained that she meets with her teachers and staff to stay current about the number of students being placed in an inclusion classroom. “We keep track of our number very steadily because when we have placement meeting, we try to make sure our numbers are not getting too high”. The school principals from these three schools create opportunities for the inclusion teachers to problem-solve practical issues such as scheduling and students’ placement. A distributive leadership approach fosters collaborative relationships among faculty (Idol, Nevin, & Paoluc-Whitcomb, 1995).

All participants from these three schools shared that their school principals provide them the opportunities to select professional development programs they see best fit their teaching needs. GETA5 stated, “Anytime I find an interesting workshop, you know, I ask for permission and, you know--and she usually gives me permission to go to it. So I usually get, you know, additional ideas”. GETB1 described her school principal to be always accommodating when it comes to training. She said, “She [school principal] is always quick to let me do any professional development or anything I want to do which helps me with the inclusion students”. SETB1 stated, “She [school principal] makes sure we get the training we need…There was one day when I said something to her in the spur of the moment about Barton training which is for dyslexia….The next day she emailed me with the information about a free seminar with Susan Barton”. Berry, Johnson, and Montgomery (2003) found that teachers felt that voluntary and self-directed opportunities were of much more value than mandated experiences.
Inclusion teachers from these three schools shared that their school principals were supportive because they foster a high sense of self-efficacy among staff. SETA1 stated, “Well, it helps very much to have a teacher who is happy to be the inclusions teacher. It is not something that is imposed on someone…. It helps me. It helps the child”. GETA1 described her instructional interventions to be based on collaboration with her peer special education teacher and not being dictated by the administration. She stated, “We are very flexible and that is probably number one…Our teacher judgement is appreciated. We are not dictated as far as to deal with our children…We are given the flexibility to work with them as we see fit.” GETA2 stated, “I know that she [school principal] trusts my decision. I fell supported”. GETA4 explained “She [school principal] allows me to be a little more flexible in my lesson planning”. GETB1 indicated that her school principal provides her the autonomy to do what she sees best fits the needs of her students. “She [school principal] gives me the luxury to do what I need to do with my kids”. GETB2 stated, “We are not micromanaged. There is a trust factor that you are going to do what you need to do…So, we are allowed the freedom, and that is important”. GETC1 indicated, “Our school principal gives us flexibility in making our own planning and scheduling time. This flexibility is a major factor. We do feel at this school that we are not being looked at by a microscope”. GETC2 said, “Our school principal is flexible in allowing us to teach our kids”. Emery (2010) asserted that teachers’ autonomy enhances teacher responsibility—which encourages teachers to take ownership of their teaching and assume greater personal responsibility for student academic achievement.

Participants from these schools reported that their school principals have been pro-active in acquiring the resources they need in their inclusion classrooms. According to Spillane and
colleagues (2001), distributive leadership involves procuring and distributing resources, including materials and time. SPLA1 shared, “I think that we have the materials that we need. If we do not, I know my teachers will share”. SPB1 said that she has been active in securing materials for students with disabilities. “We have always been able to order separate materials for several years for our ESE students”. SPLC1 indicated, “Making sure they [inclusion teachers] have the appropriate materials to help the students master the content”. According to GETA2, his school principal has been supportive in providing him the materials he needs. He stated, “When I need additional computer for my students, I go and ask our school principal--textbooks as well. She is always helpful”. GETB1 shared that the district provides all the needed materials. “The district does a really good job of providing us with manipulatives to help with kids”. Thus, school principals from these three schools supported the implementation of a successful inclusion program at their schools by allowing teachers to choose whether to teach or not in an inclusion classroom setting, to select their own professional development trajectory, to implement instructional interventions they feel best fit the needs of students, and to be part of the decision-making process relative to staffing and resources.

**RQ5: Which inclusive instructional practices do teachers use in an inclusion classroom?**

All three school principals I interviewed indicated that they model and reinforce inclusive practices at their schools, and they encourage teachers to do the same in their classrooms. Some researchers found that there is a link between the implementation of a successful inclusive educational setting and the school culture (Zoller, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). SPLA1 shared, “We include our students with disabilities in our celebrations”. SPLB1 stated, “We include
students at every level of leadership at our school”. SPLC1 indicated, “For all students, any kind of progress or growth, we celebrate”.

Although with certain variations, all participants from these three schools shared that they use accommodations to facilitate access to learning to all their students; they employ differentiation of instruction approach to specifically take each of their students from one learning level to the next; they use data to make instructional decisions; and they utilize technology. The Council for Exceptional Children (2008) described accommodations and differentiation of instruction as successful inclusive schooling practices. GETA3 reported, “I do small group instruction with them… One-on-one instruction, they get extra time if needed… They do need to be pulled out of the classroom because they cannot deal with distraction”. GETA2 described at length the accommodations she uses in her inclusion classroom.

I give them [students with disabilities] a peer, a student they work with that kinds of help them so they have a peer to work with, a partner, when they are doing work. Many times they will get additional time on assignments, or the assignment could be shortened.

All inclusion teachers reported that they use centers to differentiate instruction and to group students based on data. SETA2 explained that, “When I am pulling data, and when I am highlighting the different areas, I can pull resources and things when they are in my room”. GETB2 shared, “I use data to share with them [special education teachers] where that student is and where we want him/her to go”. SPLB1 stated, “We are constantly looking at data”. Eight out of 13 inclusion teachers indicated that they implement Response to Intervention (RtI) to monitor students’ progress and to determine whether a student should be tested or not for special education services. GETB1 mentioned that, “RtI can be good because we are quick to try to
identify children”. GETB2 said, “I think that RtI, you know you want to use RtI model”.

McIntosh et al., (2010) reported that many school districts in the United States are currently implementing teaching and learning such as RtI model to provide students high quality and evidence-based learning.

Since the district’s mandate that all elementary school students should spend 45 minutes on reading and 45 minute on math every day teachers include individual access to computer in their daily center rotations. GETB1 described, “I have a Smart Board so my kids can go to the Smart Board to figure things out. It is so tangible…It really benefits them all”. Thus, instructional practices at these three schools have been described by all inclusion teachers and school principals as supportive to fostering an inclusive education at their schools.

Finally, the statements from school principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers from the three schools indicate the school culture, notably the staff’s high self-efficacy, and positive beliefs and attitudes about the inclusion program and students with disabilities, can contribute to the development of supportive practices and processes relative to the implementation of the inclusion programs. SETA1 explained that the teachers’ positive attitude and willingness to work in an inclusion setting helps her to do her job and helps the student to learn. GETC1 shared that she herself and her peer special education teacher have similar philosophy and love for the children. “We are always just trying to see the best way to reach the child”, she stated.

All participants from these three schools reported that they feel respected, trusted, valued, and supported by their school principals and their peers. The strong relationships in these schools were manifested at both the personal and professional levels. Inclusion teachers described their
relationships to be supportive and conducive to high working performance. SPLB1 explained that she provides her teachers the opportunities to grow professionally and that she maintains an open-door policy with her teachers. GETA1 mentioned that they have a very good morale at her school and that they support each other just like a family. GETA3 explained that the ESE teachers are very supportive and very flexible in helping the general education teacher with the students. SETA1 indicated that because teachers at her school are very helpful, implementing inclusion becomes much easier. SETB1 shared that she cannot say enough positive things about her peer general education teachers with whom she was able to create a productive working environment. Thus, in these three schools a strong personal relationship appeared to have produced a supportive and positive working relationship. GETC2 expressed these conditions, stating, “We work with each other as a family. The kids are our kids…We are all on the same page as we think what is the best plan for the child”.

Although time for planning and collaboration was reported some teachers as an area that needs attention, most participants reported a positive collaboration between teachers and the administration and between special education teachers and general education teachers. SPLC1 explained, “…No teachers should feel isolated at her school…That is not going to be good”. Teachers demonstrated their willingness to work with and learn from each other. GETB2 reported that he knows his peer teachers appreciate his expertise on IEPs and RtI. Common expressions expressed in the participants’ quotes indicated a high, level of teachers’ collaboration. SETC1 stated “We share our lesson plans, we text each other, we e-mail each other, we call each other, we sit face- too face, we read each other’s blogs, we talk and plan before school and after school and in school...We are constantly talking about our students”.
Additionally, all three school principals shared that they try their best to provide their teachers time they need to plan and collaborate. SPLA1 said that the best support she has provided to her teachers was time. SPLB1 described that she tries her best to be very collaborative with her teachers so that the students benefit. Thus, teachers make personal effort to find time to plan and collaborate, and they share and learn from each other’s expertise to be able to provide the best education to their students in an inclusion classroom. GETB1 indicated that they do a lot of collaborating outside of work time. SETB1 stated, “We support each other to meet the child’s needs”.

Across all cases, participants reported that the distributive leadership approach embraced by school principals and teachers at their schools fostered their support in implementing the inclusion program and improving all their students’ academic performance. Inclusion teachers shared that they make their own schedules, they are involved with the administration in staffing students with disabilities in the inclusion classrooms, they have the autonomy to choose professional developments that fit their professional needs and to use instructional interventions they believe most appropriate for their students, they have access to their school principals, and they have all the resources they need to teach in an inclusion classroom. GETA1, GETA2, SETA2, GETB1, GETB2, SETC1 expressed that teachers are given all the flexibility they need and that they feels trusted and respected and not being micromanaged by their school principal. Most inclusion teachers shared that their school principal is always helpful in providing resources and materials they need. Thus, the presence of a distributive leadership tradition at these schools was reported by all inclusion teachers to be supportive to their efforts in implementing a successful inclusion program at their schools.
Across the three schools I visited, inclusion teachers and school principals described their instructional interventions to be inclusive. Participants reported that all students at these schools are equally celebrated when they show growth, they all have access to every program available at their school, and they are all receiving dedicated and genuine care and attention of their teachers. Inclusion teachers shared that they differentiate their instruction and use accommodations in their classrooms to ensure that each student’s academic needs are successfully met. Thus, the inclusive instructional interventions used in these schools were supportive in fostering the implementation of a successful inclusion program.

Most of the practices and processes reported by participants from these three schools have been identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (2008) as successful inclusive schooling practices. Freedman (1991) suggested that teachers are happiest when principals help them do their job by actively building bridges, fostering collegiality among teachers, widening their access to resources, and offering chances for professional growth. SETA1 stated, “The morale is very high at our school”.

**Intersections with literature.**

While there is a growing body of literature on inclusion (Baker, Wang,, & Walberg, 1994; Bargerhuff, 2014; Carter & Hughes, 2006), there is little published research on practices and processes that positively support the implementation of the inclusion program (Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kavale & Forness, 2000; King-Sears & Cummings, 1996; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). Similarly, research on special education suggests that studies that explore the perceptions of the school principals and teachers about inclusion are rare (Irvine & Lupart, 2010, Sze, 2009). The findings in this study contribute to the body of literature in the following two
fields: Organizational support and instructional support relative to the implementation of the inclusion programs in public elementary schools.

Research evidence points out that the inclusion program has been implemented in a variety of ways (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna 2004; Carter & Hughes, 2006; Hines 2001; Salisbury, 2006). The findings in this study would lead to a better understanding of the practices and processes which contribute to the implementation of a successful inclusion program in elementary public schools. The recommendations provide potential solutions to the lack of a unified approach to the implementation of inclusion in the elementary public schools. As Orr (2009) asserted, inclusion can be accomplished in a uniform way. Indeed, the practices which the participants found to be supportive to the inclusion program were organizational and instructional in nature.

Concurrent with an increased knowledge and understanding of supportive practices and processes associated with the inclusion programs is an increased understanding of how inclusion teachers use resources available to them to demonstrate inclusive practices. The common themes such as values and beliefs, relationships, structural support, leadership and resources, and inclusive instruction were demonstrated across all cases. The participants were able to capitalize on these practices and processes to support the implementation of a successful inclusion program at these three elementary schools. The themes and subthemes (see chapter 4) were similar to the four frames described in organizational research recently synthesized by Bolman and Deal (2003). Table 7 reflects the intersection of themes and subthemes that emerged from this study and Bolman and Deals’ organizational theoretical framework.
### Table 7

**Intersection of Bolman and Deals’ Organizational Theoretical and Study Themes and Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Frames of Leadership (Bolman &amp; Deal, 2003)</th>
<th>Relevant Components to the Inclusion Program (Lit. Review)</th>
<th>Common Themes from the Study</th>
<th>Subthemes from the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Symbolic frame                                 | • Culture  
• Meaning  
• Ritual  
• Ceremony | • Positive attitude  
• Self-efficacy | • Expectations  
• learning  
• Celebration |
| HR Frame                                       | • Family  
• Needs, skills,  
• Relationships  
• Empowerment | • Relationships | • Communication  
• Training |
| Structural frame                               | • Rules, roles  
• Goals, policies  
• Technology  
• Environment | • Collaboration | • Knowledge  
• Placement  
• planning time  
• Accommodations  
• DI |
| Political frame                                | • Power conflict  
• Competition  
• Advocacy  
• Organizational politics | • Distributive leadership  
• Resources | |

*Note.* Inclusion program was perceived in this study from a service organization perspective.

In a synthesis of organizational research, Bolman and Deal (2003) identified four frames to which leaders should attend concurrently in order to facilitate a successful and sustainable change: Symbolic frame, human resource frame, structural frame, and political frame.
Bargerhuff (2014) recommended in one of his studies on inclusive elementary schools that a successful implementation of the inclusion program requires ethics of caring, sufficient time to plan and to collaborate, access to resources, ongoing dialogue between educators, the development of a shared vision, and the infusion of inclusive practices in the curriculum. Participants in this study demonstrated positive attitudes and high self-efficacy toward the inclusion program; they established strong human and professional relationships within their schools; they maintained collaboration with each other; and they appreciated the distributive leadership tradition at their schools. These practices may have contributed to supporting the participants in implementing a successful inclusion program at their schools where students with disabilities’ scores on standardized tests have been above both the state and the district’s averages for the last three successive school years (see Table 1). Thus, the three profiled schools offer hope that successful inclusion programs can be developed across the district’s and state’s public elementary schools. The practices and processes that support the implementation of the inclusion program were astoundingly similar across the three schools. In an attempt to relay the findings of this study to education practitioners, I suggest six major recommendations.

**Recommendations**

Schools that engage in creating supportive practices and processes relative to the inclusion programs can implement a successful inclusion program which improves students’ learning (Farrel, Dyson, Polat, Hutchenson, & Gallannaugh 2007; McLeskey, Waldorn & Redd, 2012; Ushomirsky & Hall, 2010). The recommendations are grounded in two frameworks that have guided this study: (a) Bolman and Deals’ *Four Frames of Leadership* framework and (b) the *Differentiation of Instruction* (DI) framework (Hall, 2002). Bolman and Deal (2008 asserted
that effective and sustainable change occurs only when leaders address several fronts or frames concurrently: (a) the symbolic frame, (b) the structural frame, (c) the political frame, and (d) the human resource frame. The DI framework focuses on teaching and learning students with different abilities in the same classroom. Additionally, certain policies and practices at the school district level constrain while others support and foster the ability of school leaders and teachers to implement a successful inclusion program at their schools. The following recommendations present suggestions for enhancing practices and processes that support the implementation of the inclusion program in public elementary schools.

**Recommendation 1: Establishing a consistent district policy regarding the inclusion program**

The three schools depicted in this study, like any other public education institution, exist within a local, state, and federal policy context which influences the administrators’ and teachers’ daily work (Miller, 2011). Relevant to this study are second, third, and fourth provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) which states that (a) all children with disabilities will have a right to and must receive an Individual Education Program (IEP) that is tailored to address the child's unique learning needs, (b) children with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, and (c) students with disabilities must have access to all areas of school participation (IDEA, 2004). Consistent with this investigation is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) provision which requires that the performance of students with disabilities be disaggregated, as well as that of other groups, such as by race, socio-economic status (SES), and
English Language (NCLB, 2002 Learner (ELL) status. It is worth noting that when I began this study the NCLB was still in effect.

Most teachers and school principals from these schools reported and demonstrated that they provide students with learning disabilities a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). SPLA1 reported that both the special education teachers and general education teachers provide a variety of learning strategies to meet the academic needs of all students. She stated, “Two teachers who understand the strategies that are good for all students”. SPLB1 described students with disabilities’ access to learning, stating that, “There is no drawing of lines, or differentiation in access. Every child has an opportunity to access every program at our school”. All inclusion teachers reported that they implement each child’s IEP using accommodations and differentiation of instruction to ensure learning in the LRE.

The NCLB Act (2002) requires not only access but also performance. School principals and most inclusion teachers shared that they hold all students, including students with learning disabilities, to high expectations. GETA2 stated, “These students are able to make great gains in learning”. SPLC1 uttered, “They have to work harder”. “I think we keep our high expectations because they are very capable of learning, like everyone else”, GEB1 stated. All participants reported that they implement each student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) to increase learning. SPLA mentioned, “Making sure that teachers learn to write, read, and implement an IEP”. Thus, school principals and inclusion teachers from these three schools reported that they provide students with disabilities access to learning in the LRE, they use each student’s IEP as a vehicle
to facilitate learning by using accommodations and differentiation of instructions, and they expect that these students perform in a standards-based curriculum.

The teachers and school principals at these schools were very supportive of the inclusion program, so the assumption is that the IDEA and NCLB provisions were in concert with the vision and the mission of these schools. These schools demonstrated that they deliver learning in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to students with disabilities. In addition, the inclusion teachers indicated that they expect students with disabilities to perform as well as other students without disabilities in a standards-based curriculum. The IDEA and the NCLB requirements appear to have a positive impact on all these three schools.

The district’s director of the Exceptional Student Education indicated in the 2014-2015 Annual Policy Report that the district supports schools in implementing the federal law IDEA (2004), namely, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision. Most participants indicated that they have the materials they need and that they attend professional developments programs they see fit their professional needs. SPC1 shared, “We have access to more materials-- we can order from the district”. GETC2 stated, “When we need specialized behavior interventions, the district sends us help”.

However, other schools from the same district and the same state exist in similar policy context-- but with different outcomes. Simon and Black (2011) reported that there is a variety of ways schools frame their responses to federal policies and regulations in IDEA and NCLB in relation to students with disabilities. The three depicted elementary schools in this study demonstrated that they were able within the existing federal and school district policies milieu to successfully support the inclusion program. Thus, local school districts should learn lessons from
the successful experiences of these three schools and create a unified policy approach that could support all other schools, including low performing schools. Some researchers argue that policy makers have not yet developed policies and procedures to enact practices that ensure equitable access and progress to students with disabilities in classrooms across the country (Sommerstein & Ryndack, 2014).

Recommendation 2: Instill a positive culture about the inclusion program

Throughout this study, the participants’ message that was communicated indicates that to support the inclusion program and thus to improve the students with disabilities’ academic, social, and emotional needs, the school’s cultural environment has to be positive. Teachers and leaders must be dedicated, accepting, loving, highly self-efficient, and strong believers in the mission and goals of the inclusion program. Some researchers asserted that the culture in a school has a significant impact on the student’s learning and development (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Corbertt, 1999). Additionally, literature evidence show that there is a link between the implementation of a successful inclusion program and school culture (Zoller, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). Inclusion teachers and school principals at these schools trusted and respected each other, and they supported each other on both personal and professional levels. The following quotation from SETA1 described this positive culture I found to be prevalent across all the three schools:

In this particular school, I do not think there is a teacher I have ever worked with, that I have felt did not want to be there, and did not have the child’s best interest at heart. They are very, very productive, everyone I have worked with. They are caring about the
student’s condition in this school. Yes [smiles], the positive attitude and the willingness to work in an inclusion setting seems to be a very good practice at our school.

Schools throughout the district and the state would benefit from the experience of these three schools in relation to fostering a positive culture about the inclusion program. Carrington (1999) recommended that schools need to reflect on their values and beliefs in order to create an inclusive culture. According to these school leaders and inclusion teachers, culture of inclusion was something that is deliberatively sought and worked on to create structures within the school to provide a favorable cultural environment to inclusive practices. Most participants demonstrated the following beliefs and attitudes about the inclusion program:

- An uncompromising commitment and belief in inclusion.

All participants from these schools shared their strong commitment to the inclusion program. SPLB1 stated, “We reiterate our strong beliefs on inclusion in faculty meetings with teachers”.

- Differences among students are perceived as a resource.

Inclusion teachers reported that the inclusion program benefits both students with and without disabilities. GETA1 shared, “The socialization and interaction with general education students….It benefits both sides…Tolerance, understanding, compassion--both sides”.

- Collaborative interaction style among staff and children.

All participants from these schools indicated that they support each other and learn from each other. GETC2 described, “I think collaboration with my colleagues is great. We can bounce ideas of each other. Keeping the administration involved is great”.

- Willingness of staff to struggle to sustain practice.
The teachers’ dedication to their students with disabilities was particularly inspiring in these schools. SPETC1 stated,

You have to stick up for them even if no one else will, no matter how difficult they can be, you always have to advocate for them—because, a lot of times, no one else will and that is number one for ESE teachers.

- A commitment to inclusion ideas communicated across the school and the community.

Participants reported that they try to communicate with teachers, students, and parents to sustain their effort in seeking the best interest of the child. GETA2 described this effort. “I think just educating the parents and having a good communication between the students, the parents, and the teachers... on what is the best for the student”.

All across the district and the state schools should establish a positive culture about the inclusion program at their schools by following the recommendations listed above. A successful inclusive school requires that teachers, principals, and staff must believe that all children can learn and commit to providing all children equal access to rich core curriculum and quality instruction (Servatius, Fellows, & Kelley, 1992). Some researchers recommend cultural observation checklists (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009), or cultural audit questionnaires to developing a feedback on school culture performances (Bustamante 2009; Wagner 2006). Wagner and Masden-Copas (2002) argued that getting the culture right should always precede programs and that schools should be sensitive to their cultures are successful in improving student learning (2002, p.4).

**Recommendation 3: Balance the human needs and the school’s goals**

As described in response to RQ 2 above, relationships at both the personal and the
professional levels were strong in these three schools which supported the implementation of the inclusion program. The positive culture about the inclusion model at these schools facilitated the development of trusting, respectful, and supportive relationships between teachers and their school leaders and between general education teachers and special education teachers. GETA4 described this culture, stating, “Personally, I enjoy the inclusion kids; my partner and I asked for it”. GETC1, indicated, “We have a very similar philosophy and love for the children, and we are always trying to see the best ways to reach the child”. GETA5 described her professional relationship, stating, “We have excellent support from ESE teachers”. GETC2 reported, “We work with each other as a family”.

Additionally, most participants reported that their school leaders support them professionally by encouraging them to choose training they see best fits their professional growth. SETB1 shared about her school principal. “She is always quick to let me do any professional development or anything I want to do which helps my inclusion students”. Thus, in these schools, the common belief in the inclusion program and its benefits on all students, including students with disabilities, facilitated the growth of a strong personal and professional relationships among the staff, which in return fostered strong support to implementing inclusion successfully. Sails (2008) reported that evidence in literature indicates that school leaders were encouraged to consider their school culture as the essential ingredient to responding to more culturally diverse communities and the movement toward inclusion.

The development of successful inclusion schools requires active involvement from school leaders. There is a general consensus among researchers that school leadership is arguably recognized as one of the most important factors that determine the success or the failure of
special education programs (Dyal & Flint, 1996; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Orr, 2009; Rayner 2007). The school principals I interviewed from these three schools were clear about their strong belief in inclusion, dedicated to improving the learning outcome of all their students, and respectful and sensitive to the personal and professional needs of their teachers. Based on these three schools’ experience in creating supportive relationships among staff, other school leaders should consider the following recommendations:

- Ensure that teachers involved with the inclusion program believe and share similar philosophy about inclusion.
- Provide teachers the freedom to choose to teach in an inclusion classroom.
- Maintain an open-door policy to foster communication with teachers.
- Enable teachers to choose their own professional development programs.
- Model respect, caring, and love toward students and teachers as values of inclusion.

These recommendations were commonly practiced at the three schools where I conducted this study. These schools’ leaders demonstrated skillful human resource approach in balancing the human needs and their schools’ goals. All participants from these schools reported that the strong relationships with each other were critical in supporting their teaching in an inclusion classroom setting. “We have a very good moral at this school and we support each other as a family”, GETA1 reported.

**Recommendation 4: Build structures that foster collaboration**

In the three depicted schools, the individual positive beliefs about inclusion was established by school principals and embraced by inclusion teachers. School leaders provided *time* for *collaboration and planning* and practiced an *open-door policy* to foster *problem-solving*
opportunities for teachers. SPLA1 stated, “The best support that I have provided was time”. SPLB1 indicated that, “So, we really try to open the door for all our teachers to be able to serve the students in the best way possible”. SPLC1 stated, “They know where to find me”. Thus, **time** and **problem-solving** opportunities were two important collaborative structures these school leaders provided their teachers to support them in implementing a successful inclusion program.

Although the time factor was reported by some inclusion teachers to be a concern, they were able to create other means of collaboration before and after school hours. Some reported that they use blogs, texting, phone calls, and e-mails to talk with each other about the needs of their students. Others shared that they meet face-to-face before and after school hours. They all demonstrated that collaborative efforts to problem-solve issues were the norm at their schools.

Inclusion teachers in these schools collaboratively worked together to ensure the success of their students within and outside the structures available to them at their schools. SETC1 described her collaboration with her peer general education teachers, stating,

Most of the general education teachers have blogs, and I check the blog frequently to make sure that I am on the same page as they-- Calling, texting over the weekend….Once a week we try to aim to plan for some time of collaborative planning, and outside the school too.

The teachers profiled in these schools show enthusiasm about their work. They reported that they share their knowledge about special education programs, practices, and procedures to make sure the students’ needs are being met. GETB2 stated, “I know my peer teachers appreciate my help reading and understanding IEPs…Teachers met before school and after school every other day”. SETA1 shared, “Our principal is great. She was an ESE teacher…She has a good understanding, and that in itself is very supportive”. Some scholars asserted that knowledge
about special education programs increases the potential for the implementation of a successful inclusion program (Defur 2002; Goldstein, 2004). Most inclusion teachers indicated that their school principals encourage them to form collaborative teams, to make their own schedules, to plan together, and to share knowledge with each other to enhance their instruction. G ETA2 stated, “Time is set for us to collaborate and look at strategies, what works well, what we could work on”. The most common activities these school principals reported to foster collaboration between their teachers were as follows:

- Providing time teachers need to plan and to collaborate
- Forming study groups during the early release school days
- Providing professional development programs designed to encourage problem solving
- Onsite training to maintain focus on most relevant needed skills
- Inviting a special education specialist from the district when needed

**Recommendation 5: Apply the principles of distributive leadership**

Each of the three school principals I interviewed reported that they empower their teachers by sharing with them the power to make their own decisions (scheduling and instructional interventions) and to be part of the decision-making process (Students’ and teachers’ staffing). All inclusion teachers shared that they deeply respect and appreciate their school principals for their flexibility, trust, and respect. G ETA1 described her school principal, stating, “She is always receptive…She is very respective…She is very easy to work with”. G ETB1 said, “She gives me the luxury to do what I need to do with my kids”. G ETB2 explained, “We are allowed the freedom and that is important”.
School principals from these three schools implemented principles of distributive leadership to foster strong relationships and collaboration among the staff. Researchers show that leadership has a greater influence on schools when it is widely distributed (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). The inclusion teachers I interviewed feel empowered for not being micromanaged, respected, trusted, and valued by their school leaders and peer teachers. The most cited reasons were the following:

- Allowing teachers to create solutions to scheduling, planning, and collaboration issues.
  
  GETA3 shared, “We do our own schedules”. GETB2 stated, “We meet before and after school hours to plan and collaborate”.

- Providing teachers the autonomy to teach and to innovate.
  
  GETA1 stated,

  We are given a lot of flexibility in the classroom. Our teacher judgement is appreciated. We are not dictated to as far as how to deal with the children. We are allowed to evaluate them as individuals…We are given the flexibility to work with them the way we see fit.

  GETC1 shared,

  Our school principal gives us flexibility in making our own planning and scheduling time. This flexibility is a major factor. We do feel at this school that we are not being looked at under a microscope.

- Giving teachers the freedom to choose the training program that fits their own individual interests and needs.

  GETB1 reported, “She is always quick to let me do any professional development or anything I want to do”. SETB1 shared, “She makes sure we get the training we need”.

Ensuring that teachers have all the resources they need to teach in an inclusion classroom

SPLA reported, “Oh yes, I think that we have the materials that we need”. GETA1 stated, “When I need additional computers or textbooks, I get them”. SPC1 indicated, “Making sure they have the appropriate materials to help students master the content”.

Thus, the application of the distributive leadership principles in these three schools created a supportive environment that led to the implementation of a successful inclusion program. All inclusion teachers reported that they are part of decision-making process, they attend targeted professional development, they enjoy the autonomy relative to instruction, they are provided problem-solving opportunities, they share their knowledge, and they have access to resources they need. Schools across the district and the state should emulate these leadership activities to support the inclusion program. SPC1 summed up the essence of the distributive leadership, stating, “If they [inclusion teachers] feel isolated, that does not make for a good year”.

**Recommendation 6: Implement inclusive instructional practices**

All participants from these three schools shared a new way of thinking about the disability/ability concept and demonstrated a variety of inclusive instructional strategies in their classrooms. According to some researchers, the view that disability is rooted in the medical model remains prevalent in the education field. Based on this view, “it is the incompleteness of the individual with disability, and not the incompleteness and inflexibility of the world surrounding the disabled person”. (Willis, 2009). Throughout this study, the message among most participants was that we will do whatever it takes to make sure you learn like every other student without a disability. “We do not draw the lines in this school”, the School B’s principal
stated. Most inclusion teachers from these schools shared that they reject the notion that learning disabilities experienced by some students are tragic because they are “abnormal” and that that they hold student with or without disabilities to the same expectations. GETB1 described this way of thinking about students with disabilities, stating,

Some people think we should teach down to kids. They can do a lot of more than you can imagine…Some of the most difficult concepts, the ESE kids will get, and the other kids would not. That is fascinating to me….A lot of people believe in grade recovery, I would rather reteach them until they get it. Grade have to be true to what they can do.

Most teachers from these schools reject the determinism views that have dominated the educational landscape and not focusing on the individual’s disability landscape of the 20th century (Hart et al., 2007). Most teachers from these schools view disability in terms of learning differences among their students, and they act upon it as such. SETA1 stated, “I see that the general education students are learning that we are not all the same and we are not expected to be the same”. GETC1 said, “Not pointing them out, but just talking about our difference. It really does help all the kids, not just the ESE”. Teachers at these schools opted to focus on developing knowledge, beliefs, practices, and confidence to teach all their students who are encountering learning difficulties. GETC1 indicated, “I differentiate-- different tasks that are not just my inclusion kids, but even my lower general education students”. Literature evidence shows that learning is a holistic activity in which the salient educational differences are found in the learner’s responses to tasks, rather than in the medical diagnostic criteria that have been used to categorize students in order to determine their eligibility for additional support (Florian & Kershner 2007; Kershner, 2000).
The inclusion teachers I interviewed reported that they address the differences in learning within each individual learner using accommodations and differentiation of instructions. The Universal Design for learning (UDL) requires that teachers reach a wide array of students by providing access to the curriculum and to the variety of ways the student learns (Center for Universal Design, 2008). According to CAST (2011), three principles guide the UDL:

- Provide multiple means to representation of instructional content.
- Offer multiple means for students to demonstrate mastery of content.
- Present multiple ways for the students to engage with the content.

All inclusion teachers reported that they implement these three principles. GETB1 described,

I have implemented learning with movements and different activities, like a noodle and things that are on-line that we can do to dance and do self-calming…Which really helps…. I have a Smart Board--it is so tangible—it really benefits them…I reteach, grades have to be true to what they can do.

Six out of 13 teachers I observed in action applied the UDL principles at various degrees. They use technology, hands on activities, small group instruction, and manipulatives in their classrooms (see Table 5) Thus, participants from these schools embraced a new way of thinking about the disability/ability concept and opted to address learning difference rather than focusing on the disability. They applied the Universal Design Learning (UDL) principles in their classrooms to provide inclusive instructional practices.

**Future research**

Much of the existing research related to the inclusion program has typically ignored the policy implementation process employed by school districts in establishing more inclusive
schools (Dematthews & Mawhiney, 2013; MacKenzie, Skrla, Dickenson, & Joseph, 2011). I propose future research on the school districts’ policies that impact the implementation of the inclusion program. Within the *Four Frames of Leadership* framework, future research is needed to further explore the practices and processes that support the inclusion program. Goldman and Smith (1991) asserted that the *Four Frames* framework provides a unique window on the process of organizational change in schools. Researchers should focus on understanding the impact of the cultural, human resource, structural, and political frames on school programs such as inclusion. Schools will be better equipped to remove obstacles and to foster practices and processes that support the implementation of an inclusion program that would contribute to the success of all students. Thus based on the findings in this study, I recommend the following research studies:

- A study investigating the impact of local school districts’ policy on the implementation of the inclusion program in elementary schools.
- An investigation about the schools’ culture pertaining to the inclusion program.
- A comparative study on inclusion schools’ strengths and weaknesses based on Bolman and Deal’s four frames of the organization: Symbolic frame, human resource frame, structural frame, and political frame.
- A study about collaborative structures in elementary schools that support the implementation of the inclusion program.
- A study about the effectiveness of various models of leadership in supporting inclusion programs in high-performing and low-performing elementary schools.
- A study about the inclusiveness of instruction in an inclusion classroom setting.
The following related studies, although not closely related to the findings of this study, would extend and enrich our understanding of the concepts and ideas explored in this research:

- A mixed methods study (based on observational data and teacher surveys) investigating the degree to which teachers implement inclusive instructional practices in their inclusion classrooms.

- A study investigating the effectiveness of various models of professional development in impacting school principals’ and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs relative to the implementation of the inclusion program.

- A study examining the teachers’ evaluation models’ effectiveness relative to the inclusion teacher.

- A study investigating the utilization of Universal Design (UD) principles in the inclusion classrooms.

**Personal Statement**

Drucker (2002) asserted that looking at the strengths, we could make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant. This assertion reflects my ontological preference and molds how I understand and foresee the inclusion program in our public elementary schools. I experienced many success as an inclusion teacher under the leadership of different school principals. In the past 20 years, I professionally and personally grew into believing that the implementation of a sustainable successful inclusion program is attainable. Although literature evidence shows that inclusion has been implemented in a variety of ways within the same school district and-- even within the same school (Burstein et al., 2004, Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), I opted to fully embrace Orr (2009)’s view, “Ardent inclusionists, myself somewhat included in this
camp-- would take exception to the notion that inclusion can be accomplished in a variety of ways” (p.236).

What appeared at first during my literature review to be a sense of confusion due to multitudes of definitions and interpretations of inclusion (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Salisbury, 2006; Hines, 2001) became clear as I reflected on my own personal assumptions, perceptions, and views on the inclusion program; and on the specific overarching goal of this research. I found out that I have long ago left the camp of those who are still debating the philosophical underpinnings and the socio-educational merits of the inclusion program. I realized then that I am interested in the inclusion program, as a teacher and as a researcher, solely from a pragmatic and practical perspective. Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McLurg (2008) argued that inclusion is no longer an option and that it is essential that schools create ways to implement it effectively. Sailor and Skrtic (1996) explained that after nearly two decades of policy reform efforts relative to the inclusion program, the question has shifted from “should we do it” to “how to do it.”

Literature evidence show that some elementary schools have been successful in implementing the inclusion program (MacLesky & Waldron, 2011). To understand the practices these schools have used to support the inclusion program, I choose to investigate the teachers’ and school principals’ perceptions. Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw, and McDonald (2006) suggested that one of the first steps toward the implementation of inclusion involves identifying and understanding the perspectives and attitudes of those involved in the change process. One of my favorite philosophers from the second decade of the twentieth century, Husserl (1913) asserted that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness.
Closely related to the understanding of schools as organizations and to the inclusion program as an academic service delivery model (Sailor, 2002) was the influence of Bolman and Deal’s (2008) *Four Frames Theoretical framework*. I used these lenses as the primary framework in this study to identify and describe practices and processes school principals and inclusion teachers employ to support the inclusion program. Bolman and Deal’s four frames theoretical framework provided the expandability I needed when at the data analysis phase (Chapter 4). This frame enabled me to analyze five research questions with authenticity.

A logical outcome of the focus on positive practices that support the inclusion program (within the *Four Frames Theoretical framework* and *Differentiation of Instruction framework*) was an advocacy perspective. Through this perspective six recommendations emerged. They were centered around establishing a uniformed district policy approach regarding the inclusion program, instilling a positive culture about the inclusion program, balancing between the human needs and the schools’ goals, building structures that foster collaboration, applying the principles of the distributive leadership, and implementing inclusive instructional practices.
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APPENDIX A

University of North Florida Informed Consent

Title of Research:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS, ABD SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ABOUT SUPPORTIVE INCLUSION PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

Researcher: Ahmed Afia Laroussi

You are invited to partake in a research project that is part of the requirements for the completion of my doctoral study at the University of North Florida. The information collected in this study will also be used for publication, or presentation at professional meetings. This document describes the nature of participation, the purpose of the study, the procedures, and possible benefits and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. The signed Informed Consent document will be obtained in person prior to the beginning of the interview. The informed Consent document will be scanned and uploaded to UNF’s secure server and saved in a separate file of its own. All participants will receive a copy of the signed Informed Consent document. This process is known as informed consent.

Nature of participation.

Participation in this project is voluntary and the refusal to participate or to discontinue participation at any stage of your participation in this research involves no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to have. The identity of each participant will be protected by using pseudonyms. For the sole purpose of record-keeping, the initials and the full name of each interviewee will be indicated in her/his Informed Consent document (Appendix A). The information collected will be used for academic research, for publications, and for presentations.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this academic research is to understand school principals’ general education teachers’, and special education teachers’ perceptions about practices and processes that support the inclusion program. We hope that the findings of this investigation will improve the academic performance of students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom setting. This investigation will be conducted using a qualitative research method. Data will be collected from three elementary schools located in Duval County School District using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (teachers’ lesson plans and collaborative plans, and the School Improvement Plans). You should participate in this study if you are currently an elementary school principal or a teacher who has been involved with the inclusion program for three consecutive school years. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide answers to questions relative to your practices and process you perceive as supportive to the inclusion program. You will also be required to:

- Participation in two interviews. Each interview will last 45-60 minutes.
- Be observed in your classroom 2-3 times. Each observation will take for 30-45 minutes.
• Share with the researcher your lesson plans and collaborative plans.

Risks and Discomforts
No risks or discomforts pertaining to your participation in this study are anticipated. Additionally, all participants are free to withdraw or to decline to answer any question before during, or after any interview and any classroom observation.

Benefits
In regard to participants, there will be no material benefits or compensation for taking part in this project. However, research literature shows that the participants in a qualitative interview can be an enlightening professional and personal intellectual experience. That is, interaction enables the interviewees to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understanding of their specific experiences (Ahern, 2012; Kelley, 1995). In addition, the society at large benefits from the voices of those who are expert in the field and are not necessarily often heard. Participants in a focus group can become a forum for change (Race & colleagues, 1994).

An increasing numbers of students (6-21 years old) with disabilities at Duval County are placed in a general education classroom known as an inclusion classroom. In 2011-2013 school year 79% of students were placed in the general education classroom. In 2013-2014 school year, 81%, were placed in an inclusion classroom (Florida Department of Education, 2014). Despite an increase in numbers of students with disabilities who receive their daily instruction with their non-disabled students in a general education classroom, the implementation of inclusion as an academic service delivery remains problematic. Thus, understanding practices and processes that support the implementation of inclusion is critical as the number of students with disabilities continues to increase and as the Federal and State mandates continue to demand improvement in learning for all students. Limited funds and personnel restrict the scope of the involvement of school principals and teachers in this research.

Procedure
After I secure the IRB approval form Duval County School District Accountability and Assessment Department, I will mail to each participant the Informed Consent document (Appendix A). I will then follow up with phone calls to inform each potential participant that before beginning the interview I will collect the signed Informed Consent document in person, that this document will be scanned and uploaded to UNF’s secure server in a separate file of its own, and that each participant will have a copy of this document to keep.

Confidentiality of the participant
The identity of each participant will be protected by using pseudonyms in the case reports. The names and initial of the interviewee will be recorded on a master list that will be stored separately from data in UNF’s secure server. For the purpose of record-keeping, the initials and the full name of each interviewee will be indicated on her/his Informed Consent document (Appendix A). All data related to this study will be kept confidential by not using any identifying information (name, school name, audio recordings) in any publication, or any presentation that result from this research.

Confidentiality and Records
After I, verbatim, transcribe each interview and after I complete the member check procedure, I will immediately destroy the audio recordings. The member-check procedure involves sharing the transcripts with the interviewee to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts and to reduce the
researcher’s bias (Patton, 2002). I will send the transcripts via encrypted e-mails by sending to each participant digitally signed messages. All the transcripts will not be directly or indirectly identifiable by name, initial, or audio recordings. I will use pseudonyms for each participant and for each school. All participants’ names and initials, and the school names will be connected with participant data in a Master List as well, as well as all other study materials, will be scanned and uploaded to UNF’S Secure Server and saved in a different file of its own.

I, the researcher, the chair of my committee, the faculty advisor, the committee members, and the IRB and federal agencies, in the event of an audit, will have access to these transcripts and to any other data associated with this study. The IRB and the federal agencies will protect the confidentiality of these data to the extent allowable by law. The transcripts and the signed Informed Consent forms will be destroyed three years after the end of this study completion.

**Contact Information**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you would like to contact someone about a research related issue or concern, please contact the UNF Institutional Review Board by calling (904) 620-2498 or emailing [irb@unf.edu](mailto:irb@unf.edu). By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- You have read this Informed Consent document (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- You have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- You are 18 years of age or older.
- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- You have been involved in the inclusion program for three consecutive school years.

Participant__________________________________ Date__________________

Principal Investigator___________________________ Date__________________
Appendix B: Overview of the Interview Topics

The purpose of this semi-structured interview is to identify elementary school principals’,
general education teachers’, and special education teachers’ perceptions about supportive
practices associated with the inclusion program. The development of these questions occurred at
three levels: School principals’ level, general education teachers’ level, and special education
teachers’ level. These three levels of interview questions resulted from my understanding about
the participants’ role in an inclusion elementary school, literature review, and the committee
members’ feedback. Although few questions differ because the participants have distinguish roles
and responsibilities at the school level, most questions do overlap due to certain commonalities
among the interviewees. Since the understanding of impediments that hinder the implementation
of inclusion was beyond the scope of this study, the interview questions were worded and
structured in a way that elicits primarily positive responses. Patton (2002) argued that the use of
interview guide eases the researcher’s task of organizing and analyzing data.

As suggested by Patton, I organized these questions into five categories: a. demographic
questions to describe participants in this interview, b. behavior and experience questions to elicit
observable behavior, actions, and activities, c. knowledge related questions to know what
services are available to students with disabilities and what rules, regulations, and procedures
govern the delivery of these services, d. task related questions to seek an in-depth understanding
of practices and processes that might be supportive to the implementation of an effective
inclusion program, and e. value and opinion questions to obtain a holistic understanding of the
participants’ personal beliefs and attitudes about inclusion.
Appendix C: Interview Topics-
School Principals.

a. Demographic information
1. How many years have you been a school principal in an inclusion school?
2. What is your level of education?
3. What is your Race/ethnicity?

b. Behavior and experience related questions
4. What do you think are the most supportive practices for the implementation of inclusion?
5. Describe what training strategies help you most in implementing inclusion.
6. What positive supports do you receive from your school district to implement inclusion?

c. Knowledge related questions
7. Describe how the inclusion model should look like at its best.
8. What are some examples of the benefits of an inclusion setting?
9. Describe in which positive ways your school district’s policy impacts inclusion.

d. Task related questions
10. What are some ways you foster collaboration between your inclusion teachers?
11. Describe ways you allocate resources to support the implementation of inclusion.
12. What are some examples of best supports you provide to inclusion teachers?

e. Values/Opinions related questions
13. Describe some effective ways to promote positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion.
14. What would you like to share that you have not had the chance to report?
Appendix D: Interview Topics - General Education Teachers

a. Demographic information

1. How many years have you been an inclusion teacher?
2. What is your level of education?
3. What is your Race/ethnicity?

b. Behavior and experience related questions

4. What do you think is working best in implementing inclusion at your school?
5. Describe what positive supports you receive from your principal to implement inclusion.
6. What professional development strategies prepared you best to implement inclusion?

c. Knowledge related questions

7. Describe how the inclusion model should look like at its best?
8. What are some examples of the benefits of an inclusion setting?
9. Describe in which positive ways your school district’s policy impact inclusion.

d. Task related questions

10. What are some of the supportive practices that have helped you to implement inclusion?
11. Describe what strategies you use to accommodate students in an inclusion classroom.
12. Describe most effective ways you use to collaborate with special education teacher.

e. Values/Opinions related questions

13. What do you believe are most effective ways to foster positive attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the inclusion at your school?
14. What would you like to share that you have not had the chance to report?
Appendix E: Interview Topics- Special Education Teachers

a. Demographic information
1. How many years have you been an inclusion teacher?
2. What is your level of education?
3. What is your Race/ethnicity?

b. Behavior and experience related questions
4. What do you think is working best in implementing inclusion at your school?
5. Describe what positive supports you receive from your principal to implement inclusion.
6. What professional development strategies prepared you best to implement inclusion?

c. Knowledge related questions
7. Describe how the inclusion model should look like at its best.
8. What are some examples of the benefits of an inclusion setting?
9. Describe in which positive ways your school district’s policy impact inclusion.

d. Task related questions
10. What are some of the supportive practices that have helped you to implement inclusion?
11. Describe what strategies you use to accommodate students in an inclusion classroom?
12. Describe most effective ways you use to collaborate with the general education teacher.

e. Values/Opinions related questions
13. What do you believe are most effective ways to foster positive attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the inclusion program at your school?
14. What would you like to share that you have not had the chance to report?
## Appendix F: Classroom Observation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s intervention</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the student assigned a sit that supports visual and hearing needs?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the student located in the least distracted area?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does student have easy access to materials?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer tutoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetition,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistance with reading directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reducing tasks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation of instruction</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is instruction data driven?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers use centers?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers use Response to Intervention (RTI)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do teachers use Universal Design for learning?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers accommodate all students?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive practices</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers encourage social interaction?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers exhibit high expectations from all students?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do teachers celebrate students’ success?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the culture of inclusion encouraged by teachers?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are symbols that highlight diversity displayed in the classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: IRB Approval Document